

SEVEN SAFEGUARDS FOR MINISTRY FAMILIES

Healthy attitudes for a
pastor's household

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I happily and gratefully acknowledge my huge debt to my wife Ann with regard to much of the material in this booklet.

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Introduction

A pastor's family is his first flock. These people are his primary care and, indeed, it is within his family that his shepherding skills must first develop.

Good parenting of his children is a NT pre-requisite for a pastor's ministry. Of a church leader, Paul says, 'He must manage his own family well ... (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?), 1 Timothy 3.4,5 (cf. Titus 1.6). Paul actually describes pastoral ministry in terms of parenting skills. To recent converts he writes, 'we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children,' and 'you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God,' 1 Thess. 2.7, 11, 12.

All this points to the need for a cohesiveness between the pastor's family and his church ministry. But how should the family and the ministry fit together? What attitudes and philosophy should a ministry family adopt towards the church work? If we do not get this relationship right, the devil will play havoc with both the family and God's church.

- Some pastors are consumed with a concern to protect their families. They pursue separation from others, even perhaps other church families who do things differently from themselves. Home schooling for pastors' children has become very popular. But, while this might be right in some circumstances, commenting on Jesus' words in Mark 7.20-23, Bishop J. C. Ryle wisely writes: 'It is not enough to keep boys and girls at home and shut out every outward temptation. They carry within them a heart ready for any sin, and until that heart is changed, they are not safe whatever we do.'¹
- The outlook of some pastors' wives is that the ministry is what their husband does and has little or nothing to do with them. They pursue a career of their own (which is not wrong) but in a way which distances themselves from their husband's work and offers only minimal support to him as he seeks to shepherd *his* congregation.

Over-protection and mental distancing from the pastor's calling represent two extremes. Both are unhelpful. So, before God, what is the way forward, which is both good for the home and for the church? We enquire into this subject in this booklet.

¹ *Expository thoughts on Mark*, by J C Ryle, Crossway Books, 1993, page 104

1: Ministry needs to work for the whole family

Pastor, you cannot pursue ministry to the neglect and detriment of your family. A good family life is a precondition for ministry.

In 1 Timothy 3, Paul describes what a church must look for as it comes to appoint elders / church leaders. If you open your Bible and look at v1-7 of that chapter, you will see there a headline requirement ('above reproach' v2) – then 5 positive characteristics followed by a first proven ability (able to teach v2). That pattern is then repeated with 5 (mostly) negative characteristics – followed by a second proven ability – that of managing family well. There must be both abilities: teaching skills and people skills. *Both* sets of skills are very important. But the logic is that if a man can't cut it in the lower league of family life, he's unlikely to succeed in the premier league of God's family. So, wife and children have to be a priority for a pastor.

A pastor's wife should, of course, be a believer, 1 Corinthians 9.5. But, ideally, because of the way he handles family life, his wife should be greatly supportive of his ministry and his children should at least be okay about their father being a pastor. There should be something of a team spirit in the family about the work – even if the children are not yet Christians. In this way ministry life needs to work for the whole family.

How can that possibly come about?

Respect

The key to this is for the pastor to win the respect of his family. Paul says that 'the wife must respect her husband,' Ephesians 5.33. He looks for church leaders to be fathers whose children 'obey him with proper respect,' 1 Timothy 3.4. The words translated 'respect' in the NT cover a spectrum of meanings from valuing and honouring someone through to reverent fear.

Notice I have said a man must 'win' respect not demand it. It is the tyrant, not a good father or loving husband, who makes demands. When a wife respects her husband and children respect their dad, they are likely to be on side with him in the work because they think so much of him.

How does a Christian father win respect? This equation points out the Biblical pathway:

Godliness + Thoughtfulness + Decisiveness + Kindness => Respect

I haven't used an 'equals' sign in the equation because you cannot guarantee how people will react to you. But this is what we must do from our end to try to win respect. And it usually works because it is what we find in Scripture. Let's think briefly about each of the components.

- *Godliness*: we must know God personally, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and let him shape our spirit. This will bring a deep reverence to our own lives shown by a Jesus-like holiness and humility. We find godliness as we meet God himself in personal prayer with an open Bible, 2 Timothy 3.14, 15. When we know God experimentally there is a certain *gravitas* about us which inculcates respect.
- *Thoughtfulness*: God gave us a mind and, particularly as pastors, we ought to use it. We, above all others, should be those who are 'always prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks (us) to give the reason for the hope that (we) have,' 1 Peter 3.15. Your wife and children will respect you as they find you are a 'thought-through' person.
- *Decisiveness*: Being decisive does not mean rushing into making decisions. But it does mean having clarity of direction for the family. Anyone would find it hard to respect a ditherer. But especially, decisiveness means a willingness to make sacrifices for God's purposes, Mark 8.35. Compromise with luxury and the world will not command respect when your children know Christ has called you to take up the cross.
- *Kindness*: We will gain respect as we connect with others with love and sympathy. Particularly our wife and children need this. They cannot respect you if they feel that they don't really matter to you. Kindness shows that you really have a heart for them, which is a reflection of God's heart, Ephesians 4.32.

However, it ought to be said that all this will go with a certain light touch. Many pastors take themselves too seriously. If God truly does mean so much to us, we will be proportionately forgetful of ourselves.

There is something to G. K. Chesterton's comment, 'Angels can fly because they take themselves lightly' (as they constantly behold the face of God). We do not win respect by standing on our dignity but by setting an example of humble Christ-likeness, 1 Timothy 4.12.

That doesn't mean that the family will always love the work and find it easy but it does mean they will always love and be 'for' dad.

Confidence

With this sort of loving, respectful relationship at the centre of the pastor's family, wife and children will grow an unashamed confidence about who they are and what they stand for. There will be a self-assured 'this is us' about the pastor's home.

Pastoral life is fundamentally about caring for people and, when that is done sincerely, that is something that even children as yet unsaved can sign up to and be on board with. Thus, the home has a certain solidarity and integrity which will act as a blessed safeguard to the family.

Three things to do:

1. Since this family relationship is so integral to the home, work on keeping that relationship in good repair. Besides prayer, some families find a shared project like having a dog, supporting a team or working on the garden together helpful for this.
2. Since your family, pastor, is your base from which you minister to God's family in the church, try to develop an attitude in your home which regards the church as something of your own extended family, 1 Timothy 5.1,2. This will mean you will be careful about how you speak to each other about the church and its people.
3. Wherever you can, be involved in serving the church together as a family. Pastor, you have to stand alone, Sunday by Sunday, in the pulpit, but there is no reason why all the family cannot be involved in activities such as hospitality to church members or children's work or taking gifts to those in need. This has the added bonus of teaching your children the joy of service – which is no bad thing.

2: Recognize that ministry requires discipleship

Setting an example is essential part of church leadership, 1 Peter 5.3. And this inevitably means that your home will serve, to some extent, as a role model for the rest of the church.

Whether we like it or not, there will be those who look to your family to give a lead in what a Christian home should look like. You give a lead on life-style and standards of living for a Christian family. What kind of lead will you give? This needs careful consideration. What tone will your family home set for the church?

Different from the world

Christ has called God's people to be different from the world. We are to live out a Christian counter-culture which challenges worldly values. Jesus said, 'You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men,' Matthew 5.13. If the subculture of your family is not salty it is unlikely that your church will be salty or present much of a challenge to the world.

Your ministry is to make disciples. So, your home life should have an atmosphere of discipleship. This is something you and your wife must agree together and seek to pursue. This is something your children should understand and grasp the reason for.

A radical family

So, how should the pastor's family embody an alternative, radically different ethos from that of the world and its aspirations? Briefly, here are five avenues which our feet should tread:

- In a luxury-loving world to pursue sacrificial living

We live in comparatively affluent times. Yes, God 'richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment,' 1 Timothy 6.17. But the ABC of discipleship involves A) denying self, B) taking up the cross and C) following Jesus on the Calvary Road of loving sacrifice, Mark 8.34. Does your family expect top of the range or is there anything of 'make do and mend' about you for the good of the kingdom? As income rises, do you spend it on yourselves or give more away to the poor or to mission? Does your family exhibit that we cannot serve God and

Mammon, Matthew 6.24?

- In a morally corrupt world to pursue wholesome living

In contemporary life, the rubber often hits the road for holiness in the area of TV and social media. We are to avoid being judgmental Pharisees, but is the moral tone of your house set by Philippians 4.8? 'Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.' What does your family laugh at together and find humorous? Could Jesus join in?

- In a child-centred world to pursue God-centred living

We must not make idols of our families. The Lord Jesus warns us about this. 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters...he cannot be my disciple,' Luke 14.25, 26. Of course our children are important, but not as important as God. He must come first, not them.

- In an achievement driven world to pursue an outlook of grace

We are to love our children for who they are not for what they achieve in life, Romans 5.8. And isn't it more important that our children become Christians and grow in grace than they go to Oxford or become a high-flying executive or a 'celebrity'? They need to know they are loved unconditionally – even if they don't become Christians.

- In a complaining world to pursue contentment

Without God, the secular society inevitably produces a bunch of self-centred, even narcissistic people. Sociologists speak of the 'entitled' generation. It turns people into unthankful whiners and whingers. By contrast, a pastor's home should have an atmosphere of contentment and thankfulness. Things may be difficult at times, but our inheritance is safe in glory, 1 Peter 1.4.

The pathway of discipleship needs to be explicit. A pastor needs to be lovingly upfront with his family. 'This is what God's call on my life means for us all.' And it can be legitimately sold with plenty of parental enthusiasm even to not-yet-believing children as a simpler way of life which is generous to others and does not gobble up the earth's resources.

In Paul's footsteps

There will be times when our children may envy others they meet at school or in the church who have so much more of this world's goods than they do. A worn-out pastor's wife may long to be able to go on the kind of luxury holiday that others can afford. Such trials and temptations need to be prayed over and talked through and offered as a sacrifice. 'We choose the life we live in order to serve Christ and his people.' It's parallel to Paul choosing to forego his freedom and privileges as an apostle in order to better serve God's cause, 1 Corinthians 9.12.

Three things to do

1. Of course, when we can afford it, it is good to give the family a treat. Let them see that God is generous. But this needs to be balanced. It is such a shame when, through not enough treats or because of too many treats, a pastor's children have been turned into little materialists.
2. Recognise that affection in a family is worth more than all the world gives. 'Better a meal of herbs where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred,' Proverbs 15.17. What we may lack by way of worldly goods can be more than made up for by love and creativity towards each. There is no charge on having fun together as a family.
3. See the pathway of discipleship as a family adventure. We take risks but we will see God at work. As the family looks to him, he will provide – sometimes in the most unexpected ways, Philippians 4.19. Love and hospitality towards others in need can enrich a family far more than any amount of money. I'm sure that the result of giving his five loaves and two fishes to Jesus made a lasting impact on that little boy which changed his life as nothing else could, John 6.8,9.

3: God has given you each other – embrace it

It can seem so ‘uncool’ to be part of a ‘religious’ family these days – especially a pastor’s family. Teenagers of the manse will especially be made to feel the embarrassment of this by their non-Christian peers. ‘Your dad does *what?*’

Desperate to be accepted by friends at school, this can be a trigger of unhappiness for a pastor’s children and the source of tensions and troubles in many a pastor’s family during the adolescent years. What can be done about this? How can we protect the family against this insidious threat?

There are a number of things the pastor’s family needs to understand about itself. God’s word has rich remedies.

The gift of God

First, mum, dad and children, need to realise that the family did not come together by accident. God’s providence brought mum and dad together, Ephesians 1.11. Above and beyond the secondary causes of sexual relations between parents and resulting pregnancy, God is the giver of life. He knit us together in our mother’s womb, Psalm 139.13.

In particular, children are the gift of God. ‘Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children are a reward from him,’ Psalm 127.3, cf. 1 Samuel 1.27. Many Bible verses make it clear that children are given by God. In other words, it was God who put our family together. He assembled our household. This makes every family special and precious. And this applies to a pastor’s family just as much as to anyone else. Your family, pastor, is not a random collection of oddball human beings whose lives happened to coincide by mere chance.

Sometimes teenagers foolishly say something like, ‘I didn’t choose this family, but I can choose my friends!’ as if that makes their friendships with others somehow superior to their family. But that is foolish. There is something far more wonderful at work here. No, they did not choose their family, but God did. God brought us together. Let’s not reject that but embrace it. Pastor, teach it.

For the good of us all

Second, God is good and he put us all in our particular family because, in his infinite wisdom, he desires the best for us. God’s intention is to do good to the children by giving them to this particular family under the authority of this mum

and dad. He intends good to the mother by giving her this pastor as her husband and these children to care for. He intends good to this pastor by giving him this woman to be his wife and in making him the father of these children with a responsibility to love, protect and provide for them. This is true whether every member of the family is a Christian or not. The Psalmist tells us, 'the LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made,' Psalm 145.9.

That being the case, the best strategy for everyone in the family is to cooperate with God's intentions. We do this by seeking to walk in his ways as a family and as individuals.

The best place

Thirdly, seeing our family in this light transforms everything. Each member is a special gift from God. We start to see each other in a totally different light. When that happens, we will begin to treat each other differently. We will begin to honour one another. After all, every one of us has the privilege of being made in the image of God, Genesis 1.26, 27. Each one is not only precious but is full of potential to develop into a wonderfully unique person with a beautiful spirit.

And we are meant to help each other do that. In such a family the encouragement will far outweigh criticism. Serving each other will outdistance selfishness. Each one will be more interested in making the others look good rather than in themselves. Forbearance and forgiveness will be available in abundance with Christ's help. Helping each other will predominate over making things difficult. Love will always have the first and the last word, 1 Corinthians 13.1-7. There will be a deep team spirit. Teenagers tend to fall in and out of friendship very easily. But this family will always be there for each other come what may. So it is that this family becomes the best place to be.

And we will find that the peer group pressures from outside the home can never win over the God-given inner strength and love of such a family.

In a sermon on family life based on Philemon v2, C.H. Spurgeon says this: 'I have this advice to give. If you want to bring in others of the family who are not converted, make them happy. There are a great many more flies caught with honey than with vinegar, and there are a great many more persons brought to God by love than there are by pitiless declamations... Depend upon it, household happiness is a great means of promoting household holiness'.

Three things to do

1. Frequently express your pride and delight in each other. Be specific, 'Elliot, I really liked the way you played Jenga and didn't moan when you made the tower fall – that was so grown up.' And make clear that there is no place for sibling rivalry. 'There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him; haughty eyes....' Proverbs 6.16, 17.
2. It is good to have something like a family film night and watch things like old Disney movies when the children are young just for fun. But as they reach teenaged years watching movies which gently raise moral issues that teenagers will face in the outside world gives an opportunity to talk about such matters together in a positive family atmosphere. This can be a great safeguard for the family you love.
3. Make sure no one is left out. The family needs to be a unity, but that does not mean there is no place for individual attention. Mum, take this one shopping. Dad, go off to the match with this one. Big brother or big sister, play a game with the youngest one. And make sure there is some time for mum and dad to spend time on their own with each other.

4: Pastor, understand your wife

A pastor's wife has the ability to be his greatest helper and delight, Ezekiel 24.16, 18. Also a pastor will want ministry to be a fulfilling experience for his wife. He wants to bring her to radiance, just as Christ does the church, Ephesians 5.27.

Therefore, a pastor needs to understand what it is like for his wife to be the pastor's wife. He will want to know what it's like to be in her shoes in order to support her. This is crucial. If things go wrong for a pastor's wife, it will affect not just her and the family but the pastor and his whole ministry. So, pastor – pay attention.

A unique church member

She knows that 'pastor's wife' is not a church office – nor does she want it to be. She is simply a church member like anyone else, though hopefully a very enthusiastic one. But her uniqueness lies in three things.

- Her relationship with the people of the church:
No-one has the ear of the pastor as she does. So, some church people can treat her as a conduit to you, the pastor. This can make friendships difficult for her. Do people really want her or just want to use her to get your attention?
- Her reception of your ministry:
She wants to hear from God on the Lord's Day, but she is also listening to her husband. Because she loves you, she is very aware of the quality of your performance in the pulpit. This can make it hard to hear what God is saying. It can make Sundays difficult for her.
- Her inside knowledge of you:
She is the only church member who goes to bed with the pastor! She listens to your sermons but also knows your faults and how sometimes you don't practise yourself what you preach to others, Matthew 23.3.

Such issues need to be 'on the table' between you two. You need to strive to be as humble and consistent as possible. But you need to confess your failings to her. Honesty and prayer will help.

A woman with a lot to put up with

Put yourself in her position. What kind of husband does she have?

Your working hours as a pastor are often so long, you probably don't even know what they are. You get nervous on a Saturday night before preaching and this is frequently followed by a 'blue Monday.' You are probably less well paid and live in a scruffier house than others. You are set up for failure, because rightly if things go well at church, we thank the Lord, but if things don't go so well you tend to blame yourself. You are in a spiritual battle, Ephesians 6.12, and that often means that you are a frustrated person who is not always easy to handle.

In all these things a pastor's wife is often powerless and yet involved. She needs your love and your prayers, doesn't she?

Your most valuable resource

Cherish and look after this woman, pastor, not least because there is no helper on earth to compare with her.

Your wife is a good gift from the Lord, Proverbs 19.14. Your wife is different from you. She is designed to perfectly complement you. She looks at the world differently and her insights can be crucial for the good of the family, yourself and the church. Your wife is your prayer partner. She is there to pray with you whatever comes at you. You kneel down equal before God. You are heirs together of the gift of life and 1 Peter 3.7 explains that God's answer to your prayers will depend on how you care for her. Your wife is your essential backup. She often acts as a mother to you, Romans 16.13, comforting you and caring for you, running so much of the home for you. Value her. Spoil her when you get the chance. Your wife is your partner, Malachi 2.14, in the service of God, Genesis 2.18. Your wife is your joy. 'May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer – may her breasts satisfy you always, may you be captivated by her love,' Proverbs 5.18, 19.

Ten things NOT to do, pastor

- Assume she can produce a meal for visitors or accommodation at the drop of a hat
- Accept an away preaching date on her birthday or your anniversary
- Be in the study, opting out of family life except at meal times
- Omit to communicate information which affects her

- Use what time you have off exclusively for your personal pursuits
- Make jokes or tell stories at her expense in a sermon
- Use headship as an excuse for selfishness
- Say 'Yes' to requests which override family plans
- Expect and use sex with her for your consolation only
- Ignore or belittle her behind-the-scenes work

Three things to do

1. Make sure you don't take your wife for granted. Don't let her just live in the slipstream of your ministry. Make sure you notice what she does and express appreciation to her. Love her and tell her so.
2. Set aside time regularly to spend alone with your wife. Defend that time against other demands. She wants a relationship with you. She does not want to be made to feel that there are three in the marriage, you and her and the church. Except in very unusual circumstances, she takes priority over the church. Leave your mobile behind. Get a baby-sitter and go out together.
3. Whatever success you enjoy in ministry, make sure that you share it with her. She is your partner in the work of God. Let people know how much you owe to her and her hard work. Be proud of her both in private and in public.

5: Pastor's wife, understand your husband

Pastor's wife, you are married to an ordinary man who is called to do an extraordinary job. And you could not be more important. You are your husband's main support on earth. You probably hold the power to make or break his ministry.

With that in mind, I would encourage you to do your best to understand him.

An ordinary man

First, your husband, like any other Christian husband, is to be your Christ-like head, Ephesians 5.23. That means that although God gives him a certain authority over the family, God expects him to use that authority *not* for his own satisfaction, but for the glory of God and your good, Ephesians 5.25. Just as every decision Jesus made in his life was ultimately for the good of his church, so your husband has the responsibility to be a constant blessing to you and the family. That is a huge responsibility! Therefore, he will need your help and support. He needs your respect, Ephesians 5.33. Take every opportunity to encourage him.

Second, your husband is a sinner. Hopefully, because he is a mature Christian there will be many Christ-like qualities about him. But he will sometimes fail to live up to what he ought to be. He will therefore need your forgiveness, Matthew 18.21, 22. He could sometimes need challenging about his behaviour, but in a supportive, not a condemnatory, way. Forgiveness is not always easy, and you may often need Christ's help in this area, Ephesians 4.32.

Third, your husband is flesh and blood. He needs loving. Sex within your marriage is likely to be of enormous importance to him. There are not three sexes – men, women and clergymen. Yes, the Holy Spirit indwells all Christians, but the apostle Paul was realistic enough to know that most Christian men and women have legitimate sexual desires which are to be satisfied within the context of marriage, 1 Corinthians 7.3-5. Make room for intimacy in your lives. Quite often a pastor's difficult moods are just down to the fact that, because he is an ordinary man, he desires to make love to you. Welcome that fact.

An extraordinary work

Your husband has been called by God to be in the business of turning people from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, Acts 26.18. Eternal futures, heaven and hell, are at stake in his work. He faces demonic opposition. There are no great financial rewards or career ladders to climb. Also, it is not a 9 'til 5 job. It is full on. And although ministry has many joys and is a great privilege, it can take its toll. Underneath the surface your husband may be...

- A frightened man:
It's a huge job. In Scripture, God often has to say to leaders, 'Don't be afraid,' Joshua 1.9, Revelation 1.7.
- An angry man:
Ezekiel was bitter when called to be God's prophet, Ezekiel 3.14. He didn't want the difficult task of ministry to sinful people.
- An injured man:
Paul was not only persecuted by unbelievers, sometimes the churches turned against him, 2 Timothy 1.15. It hurt.
- A lonely man:
Moses knew what it was for other leaders, even his own brother and sister to reject him, Numbers 12.1,2.

A good pastor is usually a sensitive man – that's what enables him to feel for others and sympathise with them – but that makes all these things worse. Understand this. Help him.

You, as his wife, will be sometimes something of a pastor to the pastor. Let me use the American WWII historian Stephen Ambrose. He says that, generally speaking, the German tanks were far superior to those of the allies. But one of the great reasons for the success against the Nazis following D-Day was that when the German tanks got damaged, they were abandoned, whereas the Americans had special teams of mechanics to rescue and repair allied tanks and get them back onto the battlefield. Gospel ministry is a war and men get shot up. But a pastor's wife often has the ability to repair her man with her love, wisdom and care, and get him back into action. That is how important you are to the work.

Ten things NOT to do

- Argue or correct him harshly in public
- Blame all family difficulties on his job as pastor
- Say 'No' and 'Too busy' when he wants to do something to be kind for you
- Roll your eyes in boredom as he excitedly tries to explain his ministry to others
- Refuse to forgive him for several days when it was just your pride he hurt
- Make a separate life for yourself centred on the children or your job
- Submit to him, but with obvious resentment
- Be a perfectionist – 'if I can't be the perfect pastor's wife I'm not playing'
- Expect him to be perfect always nit-picking on his faults
- Use withholding sex as a weapon – to negotiate what you want

Three things to do

1. Pray for him. You are his partner. His work needs God's power and wisdom. These things come via the Holy Spirit in answer to prayer, Luke 11.13. You will need God's strength too. It is those who wait upon the Lord who renew their strength, Isaiah 40.31. Pray alone. Pray together.
2. Encourage him. Each of us needs to be told when we have done well. The pastor has no earthly boss to say, 'well done.' So, you do it. Be honest. Don't stoop to flattery. But tell him when the sermon really hit the mark. Build his confidence whenever you can, because there will be plenty of people who will want to knock it. And when he's down, as a Bible woman, help him to see things in perspective.
3. Keep at it. This is not a one-off. It needs to be a continual work. The Christian ministry is not a 100m dash. It is a marathon, Hebrews 12.1. He needs you with him all the way. As we have noted, in many ways one of your roles is to be a pastor to the pastor. God believes you can do it. You can be really good for this man. That's why God brought *you* to marry him.

6: Make your home special

Home is a picture of salvation and of heaven. 'In my Father's house are many rooms...' said the Lord Jesus to his disciples. He goes there to prepare a place for us, John 14.2. The Good Shepherd brings the lost sheep home, Luke 15.5, 6.

Ideally, home is where we are safe, accepted and loved, where we feel 'at home,' where we can be ourselves. And pastor, that is how your home ought to be for all your family. Even when a family member has had a difficult day, they should be able to get back, shut the front door behind them and say with relief, 'It's okay. I'm home.' Such a home is a refuge safeguarding everyone.

How can we make our home such a special place? Here are three things to consider.

The homemaker

Making a home is not simply a matter of maintaining four walls and a roof. A family is about relationships and home is the place which should strengthen and enhance those relationships. It seems that women are particularly good at bringing this about, Genesis 2.18. I stress, immediately, that it is not the only thing women are good at. But a woman's skills in this area can be almost magical and such homemakers are to be commended and never taken for granted.

The wife of noble character whom we find in Proverbs 31, is very much a homemaker. Though she has her own financial enterprises, v16, v18, she gives us a number of points to think through in making our house a home.

- *Stability:* A home is a reliable place. The wife shows strength, confidence and dignity, Proverbs 31.11, 25. There are routines which work for everyone.
- *Warmth:* A home has not only physical warmth, Proverbs 31.22, but is where each family member is specially loved, Proverbs 31.12, 28.
- *Wisdom:* A home is a place of light and good advice, Proverbs 31.26, emanating from a woman of noble character, Proverbs 31.10.
- *Generosity:* A home is a place where there is enough for everyone, even when it is not luxurious. Behind this often lies much hard work, Proverbs 31.15, 17.
- *Restoration:* A home is a place of sustenance and healing, Proverbs 31.14. Food and eating together is so crucial we will say more about this.

From the moment you walk in the door, you are greeted and made to feel you matter. Though a mother makes a home, the whole family should work towards that same goal.

The family meal table

In Scripture, the act of sharing a meal together is highly significant. It is the mark of acceptance and unity. This is why the Lord Jesus Christ got into so much trouble with the Pharisees for ‘eating with sinners,’ Mark 2.16. It looked as if God accepted sinners! This is also why the second great ordinance of the church is a meal together around ‘the Lord’s table,’ 1 Corinthians 11.20.

Ideally the family meal table is where we can be ourselves and find our identity, both individually and corporately. When a family no longer eats together regularly, it is usually in trouble.

- *Satisfaction:* Eating together gives the opportunity for enjoying something together. Even when it’s less than a feast, set the table attractively. Serve things everyone likes. Don’t let faddy-ness and fussiness over food prevail, 1 Timothy 4.3,4.
- *Interaction:* Good communication is essential for a family. Sitting down together means it is possible share at many levels – news, plans, what has made us laugh, songs, prayers. We enjoy not just the food but each other.
- *Integration:* With sharing and enjoyment comes a positive sense of togetherness. In this way, the meal table is a family’s ‘four-legged friend’ – not just at Christmas or Thanksgiving, but regularly.

The table is where we can find everyday love, courtesy and service of each other in action.

An open home

When we have a good thing going in the family home, it is beneficial to share it with others. The NT has a strong emphasis on hospitality, Romans 12.13; 1 Peter 4.9. It is right to invite friends in. But also, there are the disabled and the widowed and the poor and others who would benefit even more from joining us. And Jesus promises us that when we do this, we ourselves will be blessed, Luke 14.13, 14. This may even run to adopting a needy child.

Hospitality needs to be thought through. It shouldn’t be so frequent that family members feel that they are no longer special. But pastor, when you show

hospitality you are giving your children a little window through which to see Christian love in action and therefore something of the genuineness of your faith.

Three things to do

1. Discuss and put in place routines that make for your house a nice place to come home to. Is it a cheerful place? Is it relatively tidy? Is it clean and wholesome? Pastor, as father of the family, show a lead in doing chores and endeavouring to make the home a welcoming and pleasant place. Especially do not take your wife's hard work for granted, but be the first to express thanks and appreciation.
2. Have some positive rituals attached to the family meal table. Have a workable and agreed start time. Say grace together, Luke 24.30. Maybe lighting candles, to make sitting down at table special, would help. Model enthusiastically enjoying God's gift of food. If eating together every day is not possible, work out when it is possible and stick to it.
3. Think about making the Lord's Day particularly special at the meal table. It is the day of celebrating the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and looking forward to glory, so why not have the best breakfast of the week plus the best lunch of the week on Sundays?

7: A spiritual home

The most peaceful house I ever visited was a pastor's home in Kenya.

Some years ago, a friend and I were visiting churches in a remote part of the country. The pot-holed dirt roads, far from the capital, were difficult for our little hired car and the day's driving had been very tiring. Finally, we arrived at a kind of hut up a track off the main road. It had a corrugated iron roof, ragged cement walls and little by way of a kitchen. We were welcomed by a smiling Pastor Washington Were, his wife and family. They were already pushed for space but found space for us on a makeshift camp bed in an alcove, where the pastor prayed and worked on his messages with a few battered old IVP Tyndale Commentaries. Superficially you would think it was not the most commodious dwelling. But the sense of God's peace in that place is something I will never forget. With these people I had never met before, I felt safe and absolutely 'at home.' Needless to say, I slept deeply and woke the next day thoroughly refreshed.

Where did that sense of peace come from? It came from God. This was a spiritual home. These were people of prayer, who immersed themselves in God's word and the Lord was with them, almost tangibly.

As we conclude thinking through safeguards for a ministry family, this is inevitably where we must end up – with God himself as our refuge and strength, Psalm 46.1.

Personal devotions

In the first chapter, we saw that the key to gaining respect as a husband and father is spending time with God. Of course, all our time is spent in God's presence whether we are aware of it or not, Acts 17.28. But our lives are blessed as we consciously seek his face and wait upon him, Psalm 27.13,14. As we 'gaze upon the beauty of the LORD,' Psalm 27.4, we ourselves are changed from one degree of glory to another, 2 Corinthians 3,18. We know God's peace as we pray and read his word and so we become a source of peace for our families, Philippians 4.6,7; Isaiah 26.3.

So, pastor, not least for the good of your family, you must be a man of prayer. Let me suggest three adverbs for your devotions.

- *Early:* The first part of the day has advantages. You are less tired. There are unlikely to be phone calls etc. to disturb you. The Psalmist says, 'O God, you are my God; early will I seek you,' Psalm 63.1. Start the day with praise.
- *Regularly:* Your prayers need to find a daily routine. Daniel had such a prayer routine and did not budge from it even under threat of his life, Daniel 6.10.
- *Honestly:* Your prayers need to be sincere. Prayer and Bible reading can be joyous, but it can also be a battle, Colossians 4.12. Don't be satisfied with a mere ritual. If you are spiritually dry, tell the Lord. Seek him. Thirst for him until he draws near.

Sadly, many of today's pastors do not read Scripture, except for preparing a sermon, or have much of a prayer life. Be different.

Family devotions

As the head of the family give a gentle but enthusiastic lead in spiritual things.

Pray with your wife. You both should have your separate personal devotions. But then just for 5 minutes each morning pray together, 1 Peter 3.7. Pray for the family. Pray for whatever is going on in the church. Pray for those you know on the mission field.

Pray with your children at the breakfast table. Read briefly from Scripture with them at bed-time prayers and sing 'Glory to Thee my God this night' (or something similar). Children love routines. But keep it short and sweet. Avoid being too heavy. Your children will no doubt be taught at church and in Sunday School. What they need at family prayers is living Christianity connected to their daily lives, Psalm 34.4. Pray for them and what faces them that day. When children see specific answers to such prayers it makes a real impact on them.

Family prayers around the meal table is also the place for Dad and Mum to confess their faults and pray for forgiveness, when they know they haven't handled things well which affect the children. We are all sinners who need forgiveness, Romans 3.23. Model that in your family.

God's promises

Our relationship with God is based on his promises. There is no better foundation. We are weak, failing people. But he promises grace and mercy for sinners through an all-sufficient Saviour, Hebrews 4.16, 724, 25. And he is forever faithful to all he has said. The promises are rock solid.

'Draw near to God and he will draw near to you,' James 4.8

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the LORD.' Jeremiah 29.13

Three things to do

1. Just as Adam, the first man and head of our race, was first in the garden of Eden, Genesis 2.15, pastor, be the first up each morning as the head of your family to prepare the ground for the day ahead through prayer and waiting on God.
2. If your wife is the kind of woman who likes to start the day with a cup of tea in bed, make it for her. Show her you care for her at the beginning of each day and give her breathing space to start the day with God.
3. If your children are young and rise early, do your best to keep an eye on them while at the same time reading a little Scripture and praying. It is not ideal, but do what you can. The Lord knows your good intentions.

Make your house a spiritual home.