

PK's and the Pressure of Ministry

by Chaplain George

My wife Linda and I have been married thirty-seven years and have five children, ages thirty to thirty-six. Our kids have lived most of their lives as “the preacher’s kids.” I want to acknowledge the input I’ve received from them in writing this article. Their statements are duly noted.

I will be honest and tell you that in the early years of my ministry I made many mistakes that negatively affected our family. I was full of faith, desire, and enthusiasm, but I was also young, inexperienced, lacking in wisdom. Thankfully those blunders became teachable moments in my life that eventually strengthened each one of us. They, too, have played a significant role in shaping the content of this piece.



In Luke 12:48 we are reminded that “to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.” This is true for all of us who have been called of God to serve in ministry. The same principle surfaces in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9, where Paul lists a number of “qualifications” for those who are to serve as leaders in the Body. These “qualifications” extend beyond the minister to include his wife and children. That’s because a man’s character is most clearly reflected in his family life. And character *does* matter. Not only that, but it ought to be visibly evident (1 Timothy 3:2a). I think we can agree that Paul takes this much for granted.

Problems arise when expectations are placed on the minister and his family that go *beyond* the intent of Scripture. Let’s face it – in many ways, being in ministry is like living in a glass house. It’s hard to establish and maintain realistic boundaries when people are constantly looking in on you and your family. In response to this kind of pressure, some ministerial parents burden their kids with unrealistic expectations – expectations that can be emotionally and spiritually damaging. This is something we should work to avoid at all costs. Certainly God wants PKs to be obedient and respectful and to avoid doing anything that might give them the reputation of being wild or rebellious (1 Timothy 3:4b; Titus 1:6). But He doesn’t demand that they be perfect.

I’ve worked or counseled with a number of ministry families who had an “out-of-control” PK. In most of these cases, I would say that the problem was the result of inconsistent parenting. I cannot help but think of Eli, “who did not use his authority, or lay his commands upon his sons, nor restrain them from evil, or severely reprove them for their sins, but neglected them, and was too mild and gentle with them” (1 Samuel 3:13) *Gills Exposition on the Entire Bible*.

If our goal is to raise emotionally and spiritually healthy PKs, we must heed the call given to Abraham,

who was instructed to “command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord” (Genesis 18:19). At the same time, we have to be careful to avoid parenting out of fear of what “Sister Sandpaper” may say about our kids.

I’ll admit that, in my case, it took a while for this lesson to sink in. But when it did, it became firmly rooted in my heart. At that point my wife and I told our children that if their lives were good enough for us, they should be good enough for anyone in the church! I think they appreciated the vote of confidence. From that point forward we had an understanding, and I believe that understanding made all the difference in the world.

The results? Well, here are some of the things my grown-up kids have to say in retrospect about their experience as PKs:

The positive side of being a PK (excerpts from my kids):

- “We were plugged into the deeper side of worship, prayer and Bible study.”
- “We had a degree of notoriety due to dad’s stories from the pulpit about our family.” “We had opportunities to personally meet and interact with guest speakers.”
- “Every member of our family was involved in serving to some degree. Cleaning the church, helping in nursery, later teaching Sunday School, working in the food pantry, and being part of the worship team. We learned to be responsible participants in the Body of Christ while discovering our own gifts and talents.”
- “I liked talking to ‘Pastor-Dad’ and gained a strong interest in doctrine and theology that has served me well as an adult.”
- “We learned in our parents that church leadership could be respected.” “Most importantly, Dad was the same in the church and in our home.”

The negative side of being a PK (excerpts from my kids):

- “As PK’s we saw the negative side of ministry. As one friend put it, *there is no mean like church mean!*”
- “We felt pressured (not from our parents) to be what people thought we should be as the pastor’s kids.”
- “One experience early in my PK-hood: a person told me how my behavior could cost my dad his new job as pastor. This was way too much pressure to put on a boy only ten years old. It resulted in a performance-based mentality that took me years to overcome.”
- “I was lonely. I think other kids were afraid to be my friend.”
- “Dad had a *target on his back*. People tried to treat him like they owned him.”
- “Ministry was very hard financially on our family. Dad had to work part-time or full-time jobs to provide for our family.”

Advice from one PK to another (excerpts from my kids):

- “Don’t be afraid to talk to your parents. Find a respectful way to tell them about your concerns, doubts and fears.”

- “It is not rebellious to question what you have been taught.”
- “Be authentic in your relationship with God. Ask them to pray with and for you.”
- “Don’t be afraid to ask them to write you into their calendar in PEN!”
- “God has placed your dad in an amazing position, but he is still human.”
- “Learn to forgive and remember that heroes don’t have to be perfect.”
- “Learn the difference between following Christ and a good man.”

I think you can see why I’m so proud of my kids. I’m not afraid to admit that. Nor would I hesitate for a moment to assert that *your* children can grow up to be just as wise, insightful, and spiritually mature as mine. The key is to remember that *your family takes priority over your “ministry.”* Your greatest calling is *their* care and nurturing – emotionally, spiritually, and relationally. Your church will survive without you; your spouse and children may not. So invest in them lavishly. Find ways to include them in your private and professional life. Determine that you will lead by personal example. Live an authentic Christian life, where you are the same person in the home as you are in the pulpit. And bear in mind that one of the best things you can do for your PKs is to protect your marriage at all costs. Don’t be afraid to let them see affectionate and romantic exchanges between you and your spouse. Remember – your kids learn more from what they see you do than from what they hear you say.

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