

# *Self-Care*

Too many pastors experience *stress and burnout* within the ministry, getting life's priorities out of balance. The fact is **God should always come 1<sup>st</sup>, followed by our families, and then everything else should follow (including our occupation and church)!!!** All of us should basically know this, but too often we become so busy in life and with our calling that we place others in the forefront of our priorities. The lack of proper priorities in your life can and will result in your spouse and children feeling neglected, misunderstood, unloved or unimportant, and treated unfairly. Our calling can become ineffective if we neglect spending precious time with God.

To better guard ourselves from the dangers of placing others first, we have listed **6 areas** that are needed to bring balance back into your life. God expects us to be strong and have a strong support network that constantly provides the love and support needed to overcome the stressors associated to the occupation as pastor. ***We have a Self-Care Assessment Worksheet at the bottom of this article to help assess areas of need.***

## 6 Areas to bring Balance in Your Life:

**God Comes First.** Most may feel this is an elementary statement but where do you spend most of your time and energy? Too often, our pastors burn a candle at both ends due to not maintaining proper boundaries and safeguards in their lives. Do not allow anything to prevent you from your "first love".

Make time to keep improving your relationship with God through prayer, meditation, and Bible reading. How will you know God's will if we do not spend much time talking and listening to Him? By spending quality time with Him, He prepares us to lead our family and church in the way he wishes us to do so.

Family and church duties will not improve our relationship with God. Once we have maintained **God First**, then and only then are we able to be a better husband, wife, father, or mother. Only then, can we be the best pastor to our church members and community. God comes first!

**Reserving Family Times.** Keeping up the boundaries between ministry and family life can be a tall task for clergy families, especially those who live in church housing. One boundary that needs to be emphatically established and protected by you is making sure you have quality family times together. We must learn to regard family times as more important than church appointments, calls, or demands. We must plan activities, ball games, school events, date night, vacations, etc. with our family and mark them down (red) on every calendar (ours and the church). When scheduling conflicts (they are inevitable), we should talk about the family time in terms of a commitment we have. ***Too***

*many times, family times are broken just because someone else is demanding more of your time and that time is not necessarily an emergency!*

**Protecting Privacy.** A second boundary is the issue of private space or having private times for your family. Whenever a pastor lives in church housing, many church people may feel that the home is a part of the church. They need to understand the need for privacy:

- Avoid, if possible, having a church office within your home.
- Have a different phone number than the church.
- Do not invite unannounced visitors or anyone else from church into your home during family times (family night, special dinner, game night, birthday parties, Saturday morning pajama parties, etc.).
- Do not expect your family members to take the role of phone receptionist.
- Ask church members to use your home phone number for emergencies only.
- Take a regularly scheduled day off from church work and let your membership and staff know that is personal time off. Too many pastors are inconsistent and perhaps give the impression that your time and family times are not important.
- When meeting parishioners on family outings, be brief. You are not obligated to strike up long conversations. What is most important? Your family!
- Do not overuse illustrations from family life and avoid jokes that come at the expense of a family member.

**Clarify Expectations.** Many congregations have unfair expectations pertaining to the pastor and their families. For the sake of your family, you must identify and clarify those expectations or else they can become a tremendous stress factors to you, your family, and to your congregation. For example, the church has always had the pastor's wife to chair the women's group. If your wife is not willing to do so, then clarify it at the beginning of your tenure. After all, the pastor was the person employed, not the spouse or children.

Higher standards for the pastor and their family are often expected. While these higher standards may not be written down anywhere, they are still often expected. For example, the pastor's children must be the best behaved, most courteous, and never in trouble. The pastor's wife must be the best hostess, serve on every committee, or play the piano. These standards bring stress and division within the congregation. A congregation should not expect more or less than any other member of the congregation.

**Building Friendships.** Many pastors set boundaries of not becoming too close to anyone within the church because of the dual relationship. One of the problems of pastors is that many have not fostered a close relationship with anyone. 70% of the pastors state they do not have a close friend that they can share their concerns and problems with.

We all need to be surrounded by the warm presence of friends and loved ones. The problem most pastors have had is that fostering friendships and relationships require

investments over long periods of time. Many pastors have moved frequently and have not had the time to make friends. Therefore, pastors and their family must take a more deliberate effort than most other folks toward building and fostering friendships. Choose people wisely, those you can trust and will support you during good times as well as bad.

**Seeking Help.** Pastors are in a profession of helping others. People who are in a “helping profession” are often the last to seek help for themselves. The pastor’s family, just like any other family, has a right to be human and to have human problems. Pastor’s family has a right to seek help in counseling or any other resources and services available for pastors. Call ***Pastoral Care, Inc.*** if you need any assistance. Let us help you.