



Ministers' Fraternal Study Guides

The Minister's Family

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Introduction

Two important facts should be recognised about the Minister's Family. First, his family is no different from any other Christian family. Biblical instruction on family relationships is as applicable to the minister's family as to any other. Second, it is also true, however, that a minister has special responsibility towards his family. He is to be an example to the flock entrusted to him in every area of life, and the New Testament qualifications for church leaders link spiritual effectiveness in the home with spiritual effectiveness in the local church. A minister cannot expect to serve others effectively if he is of little use to those closest to him. Neglect of the family can undermine the minister's pastoral and teaching ministry. His family may well be the object of special attack by the evil one. Satan knows that if he can damage the minister's home life, he can spoil his total usefulness.

As we seek to submit to God's word in all that it says about being a husband and father we must seek to be honest and realistic in our discussions. J.C. Ryle suggests that, 'The plain truth is that home trials are one of the many means by which God sanctifies and purifies his believing people. By them he keeps us humble. By them he draws us to himself. By them he sends us to our Bibles. By them he teaches us to pray. By them he shows us our need of Christ. By them he weans us from the world. By them he prepares us for "a city which hath foundations," in which there will be no disappointments, no tears, and no sin.' (J.C.Ryle, *The Upper Room*, Banner of Truth 1970, page 257). Any minister who suggests that being a godly leader of his family is easy is probably deceiving himself!

Key Biblical Data

Deuteronomy 6:4–8
1 Samuel 3:13
1 Timothy 4:4–5
Titus 1:6
Ephesians 5:22–33; 6:1–4

Overview

The specific circumstances of every minister's family will be different and will also be subject to constant change, especially as children grow up.

Pressures which may be faced by a minister's wife

Particular pressures may be faced by a minister's wife as a result of her husband's work. For example, the pressure of the expectations of her (real or perceived) by the congregation; financial pressures (often felt more by wives); loneliness; protectiveness towards her husband when he is criticised; the feeling that she is sharing her husband with a much larger group of people; the tensions that may arise if the home is also a workplace; the busyness of Sundays, which can often be anything but a day of rest.

Discussion points:

- What other particular pressures on the minister's wife are known to the group? How can they be avoided/allayed?
- What points of tension do our wives feel most in our present family circumstances?
- How can we best help them with these tensions?

Pressures which may be faced by minister's children

The children of ministers may also face unique pressures. A higher standard of behaviour may be expected of them by members of a congregation. There is a danger of them growing up resenting the time their dad spends at church. There is also the danger of them adopting an outward form of godliness without a true relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Discussion points

- What other particular pressures on the minister's children are known to the group? How can they be avoided/allayed?
- How can we help our children not to grow up resenting the demands of the ministry, but rather involve them in the privilege and joys of it?

Areas of agreement

It is indisputable that a minister must make the leadership and care of his family a priority. He must pray for their spiritual well-being, take action to safeguard his marriage, parent his children, and be a faithful under-shepherd of both his wife and children. This requires time and will not happen without deliberate thought and effort. He must ensure that he does not give the impression that his work is more important than his family. He must care for them spiritually, not in a professional or patronizing way, but out of love for them.

How these areas of agreement work out in practice will vary depending on the particular changing circumstances of each family. What may be appropriate at one stage of family life might not work at a later stage.

The new birth being a supernatural act of God's grace there is no guarantee that a minister's children will be converted. Rebellious and unbelieving children are a source of great sorrow and heartache.

Discussion points

- What wrong motives need to be avoided as we consider the way we lead our families?
- What steps can we take to guard the time we spend with our families?
- How might we best use our weekly day off to serve our family?
- In what ways can we help our wives to grow spiritually?

Areas of disagreement

There are some areas of the minister's family life that may cause some disagreement in a ministers' fraternal. We must be able to discuss these frankly and disagree with charity, so do not avoid such issues. A few are listed below in no particular order.

Discussion points

- For how long should we persist with family prayers?
- Should a minister have a daily quiet time with his wife?
- Should a minister's wife be employed outside the home?
- Should a minister's children be forced to attend church activities?
- Is it preferable for the minister to work from home or at an office away from the home?
- What is the best way to make time for the family: daily, weekly, monthly, annually?
- How much should a minister share pastoral and church leadership matters with his wife?

Suggested reading (a brief but non-exhaustive list)

Heather Tinker, *Who'd be a Minister's Wife?*, Christian Focus 2002.

Derek Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor*, Moody 2004, chapter 13.

Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, Crossway 2001, chapters 3 and 4.

Kent and Barbara Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Family*, Crossway 2004.

J.C.Ryle, *The Upper Room*, Banner of Truth 1970, chapter 16 on The Duties of Parents.