

Marcus Honeysett (ed. Richard Collins)

The Leader's Home

(Part Two)

The following is an edited version of an address given to the All Souls Langham Place School of Evangelists in November 2011. This is Part Two. The main audience was evangelists but the talk is equally applicable to other leaders in local churches.

Respecting and honouring our families is non-negotiable

So let me ask, 'how is your home?' I pray that it is well with you. If you find the Holy Spirit prodding you, it is critical that you spend time examining your patterns to see if they are godly. Respecting and honouring our families is not negotiable. It is at the heart of ministry. Perhaps more than anyone, evangelists can be prone to compulsive work habits. They find it easy to justify a busy-is-best mentality. Perhaps the Lord is challenging you to find some external accountability. Not for your work, but for how you care for those closest to you. We are created for intimate relationship, and no amount of ministry achievement can satisfy or compensate for that particular need.

“We are called to ministry, but we are created for family.”

in the last few years. How much attention do you think is given to a leader's home and family life? Almost none at all. It's quite illuminating, isn't it? There's lots of talk about vision, but few mention

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I have read many books on Christian leadership

character and family. You can draw your own conclusions. The few books on being a minister's wife range from helpful to excruciating. A good one I recommend is by Ann Benton, Val Arch and others. *The Minister's Wife*. It's from IVP.

People who write books about leadership focus on that topic alone. They don't appear to consider the importance of a leader's prayer life, their marriage, family or friends.

Books on these subjects for non-leaders exist, but there is very little out there to help full-time workers.

Let me offer two caveats:

1. It is just as possible to make home and family life into an idol as it is to make ministry into one. I'm not calling for the pendulum to swing the other way to the extent that we turn our families into idols to the neglect of our God-given callings. Not at all.
2. Not everyone here is married or has children. Maybe some are alone, without family. For you, you face the temptation to fill up all of your life with ministry. Two things for you. Paul says in 1 Cor. 7:32 that the unmarried are free from other anxiety in order to be

more focused on how to please the Lord, to be holy in body and spirit. You have the blessing of undivided interests and undivided devotion. But secondly, don't let that tip over into a work obsession so that you have no home life. Friends are especially important for you. Friends in ministry maybe, but really just friends. It wouldn't be quite correct to apply Eph. 5 to friendships, but there is plenty in Acts and the pastorals enjoining us to friendships of depth, that constitute home life in your situation.

Peter Brain expresses the pressure of ministry on home life well:

A good case can be made that the first church is the family. We are born before we are born again. Creation takes place before regeneration. God is the author of both, as it would be ungodly and therefore unwise to exalt the one and disregard the other. If this is the case, pastors would be wise to keep the balance by maintaining the priority of the family. It is easy to neglect one's biological family in order to invest energies and time in the church family. Sometimes churches can actually promote and applaud the pastor's affair and "adultery" with the church. This is called "spiritualised adultery" by Paddy Ducklow, which he explains as "the daily reality of the church becoming the paramour" which "seems to lead the list in clergy marriage complaints" - when the pastor loves his work more than his home life. When this happens, says Dr Dennis Guernsey, "the pastor's wife is put in a terrible bind when the church becomes The Other Woman - but her husband isn't unrighteous for sleeping with her. No one considers this obsession immoral; he's doing God's work.

It is easy to see how all this happens. It is rarely a case of intentional neglect. It tends to be a gradual process that flows out of a desire to be wholehearted in Christian discipleship, and faithful in the pastoral vocation.

(Peter Brain, *Going the Distance*, pp.102-103)

Leaders flourish when home life flourishes

We are called to be workers with others for their progress and their joy in the faith, so that they overflow abundantly with joy in Christ. That is

the heart of all biblical spiritual leadership. That is what we plan for, work for, and disciple for. So that people come to Christ and grow up into Christ and delight in God through Christ. It is extremely common, however, that those who are evangelists, who work for the joy of others, don't receive the same encouragement from others. And in many cases, our close families receive it least of all. George Carey writes this:

Churches die when leaders die. Churches die from the top downwards.

I would add that ministries die spiritually when families and home life die spiritually. Ministries die from the inside out. Churches flourish when leaders flourish. And leaders flourish when home life flourishes. Yet most people in our churches have no idea who spiritually feeds those who feed them. Or even that it is happening at all. They assume it goes on behind the scenes. In very many churches, that is an unwarranted assumption. We tell others, 'Jesus says come to him and take his yoke, which is light, and enjoy being connected to him.' We know that is where spiritual energy comes from.

We neglect it for ourselves and our families at great peril.

Marcus Honeysett is founding director of Living Leadership. He has extensive experience as a speaker and writer and as a church elder for training and discipleship. His books include *Finding Joy* (IVP, 2005) and *Fruitful Leaders* (IVP, 2011). Marcus is married to Ros and they have one son.

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