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BUILDING FAMILY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN BUILDING MINISTRY

I WAS A VERY YOUNG PASTOR in a growing church. I had my academic degrees behind me and was engaged in my pastoral venture — hook, line, and sinker! I was in my late twenties and had been married for just under ten years. Josh was four or five years old and Nick was only one or two years old. I was zooming and filled with life, vitality, and vision.

God was doing some marvelous things in our church. We had seen it come alive with great passion and fire for evangelism. Everything was growing.

I am confident that in my youthful zeal I made several mistakes. I was probably too confident for some to appreciate, and the growth of the church had become a threat to a few others. I understood spiritual warfare to some degree at this time in my life. I had already pastored some churches and was well aware of many of the challenges in this dimension of leadership. However, it emerged to an entirely different and unprecedented level in my life and ministry in this particular church.

It was interesting to watch. We would have heaven on Sunday as God would move profoundly. Attendance was surging, people were being won to Christ, and people were growing in their faith. Yet there were always conflicts and challenges beyond what I had ever encountered at that time in ministry life. Because of my immaturity in life and ministry, I did not handle it all very well, but I was mature enough spiritually to have an ear for God every morning and my heart was to do His will above all things. I discovered that God had me in that church not just for them at that season of their journey, but for me. He wanted to use them to refine me, break me, and bring me to an end of myself. It took me a while to get to this place, but I did get there.

Heaven was happening on Sunday and then trouble returned on Monday. Meetings were dominant in the church world back then, and they seemed to occur nightly and continuously for pastors in that season of American church life. It is important for you to know that Jeana had been raised in a pastor's home, so she understood the challenges of church and family to a degree, but I was exhausted and my family was caught in the middle of it all.

I would hurry home around 5:00 p.m. in order to get back to an early evening meeting with some committee or group of leaders. As stated already, warfare was intense, my family was very young, and the church was growing. I knew it was taking its toll on Jeana and me. The boys were way too young to feel it or know it, but I was neglecting them due to all of the demands on my life.

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One night on my journey home, I came to a stop sign. I believe I could take you to it today. It was like the Holy Spirit spoke to me in that still, small convicting voice. I am not sure what occurred, but I am confident of what I told the Lord at that very moment. I said, “*Lord,*

I will stop sacrificing my family on the altar of ministry success.” That event and moment has shaped my life and family to this very day. God used all of the circumstances to teach me and help me. Had God not taught me that lesson at a young age, it might have been catastrophic later in ministry, marriage, and life.

In time, I believe Jeana and my family became aware of this new truth in my life, even to the point of believing it. She and the boys knew, “Dad will not sacrifice us in order for the church to grow.” At the same time, they realized their dad and husband had great responsibilities and his life was not his own, it was God’s.

Therefore, I believe that building your family *is* more important than building your ministry. Not only have I believed it, I have lived it. Today it stands as probably the only legacy I will ever see this side of heaven. I would not trade anything for it that ministry offers. My family is a major work of grace and grace alone. God has answered and continues to answer our prayers concerning our family. We have been and are blessed immeasurably.

The people in our church and various pastors regularly ask me, “What did you and Jeana do to get the marriage and family you have?” I can assure you that we did some things wrong, but we also did some things right. We were good learners from our mistakes and from other people we admired, but most of all we learned so much from the Lord and His Word.

As I have evaluated our journey in blending marriage, family, and ministry with balance, I have narrowed the journey to seven values that we observed in our family. These seven values were things we esteemed, believed in, championed, and rewarded continually.

VALUE PRAYER

I realize we are ministers and this sounds like something you would expect another minister to say or try to prove he does, but make no mistake about it: *You will not succeed in marriage, family, and ministry without prayer.* The tango of the three may lead to danger if not done with prayer. Obviously, if you have gotten this far in the book, you have learned of my personal commitment to prayer. With that understood, I will move to how we valued prayer in our family. However, please remember, these suggestions will mean nothing if you do not grow in your own personal prayer life. In fact, this is where most family and ministry battles are won.

Pray the Armor of God on Your Family

For at least two decades I have prayed Ephesians 6:10–18 over my family daily. This passage speaks of the armor of God

over the believer. I used to read the passage, but now I pray the specifics of the armor, getting my family ready to face the day. I call their names out to God

specifically and then place the armor on them piece by piece. I do this for all of our immediate family.

We are in a war. Satan goes after your family with great intensity. His will is to destroy your family and church. You cannot give that ground over to him. Therefore, stand your ground in Jesus' name by placing the armor of God on your family in prayer daily.

Pray Specifically Over Your Family

As a minister, be transparent with your family. Prayer makes you transparent. It demonstrates you cannot do it on your own. How can you pray specifically?

Pray with your children before they go to school. We did this daily without exception. Pray through the various crises or situations you face as a family. Pray with your spouse nightly. Jeana and I trade off nightly as to which one of us will pray before we go to sleep.

VALUE MARRIAGE

The greatest thing you can do for your family is to have a spiritual and enriching marriage relationship. If you want your children to make the right decisions in life, especially

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in relationships, then you have to have a healthy and godly relationship with your spouse. This is a model before them and mentoring in action in the finest fashion.

When you disagree from time to time with your spouse, try not to get into an argument in front of the children. This breeds insecurity and jeopardizes how your child will treat their spouse one day. Mild disagreement may be acceptable, but preserve for your privacy the real verbal struggles. As well, never undermine or demean your mate in front of your children. Get in a room, solve your issues, make up (which can be great!), and move on. The greatest thing you can obtain in marriage and ministry is having a “great forgetter.” Leave it alone and press on!

One of the actions I took from the time “the stop sign moment” occurred was that I take off every Friday and spend it with Jeana. It is our day, and I attempt to stay away from the office. I try to delay all church e-mail and phone calls. I tell my people publicly it is my day with Jeana. What do we do on Friday together? Sometimes we hang around the house; we eat lunch together, shop, go to a movie, or enjoy engaging in various activities with our children and now our grandchild. It is rare that I agree to be away speaking somewhere or doing something on Friday. We only do that in either of our schedules if we both agree to it first. This has become one of the greatest days of my week and I look forward to it weekly. When your children and others observe this practice, you personify how valuable your marital relationship really is to you. When you spend uninterrupted time with your mate consistently and

weekly, your mate and your children know that your family is more important than your ministry. You can put up with a lot during the week if you know Friday is coming!

VALUE CHURCH

The minister and his family need the church in their lives as much as any other family needs the church. We love the church!

I always told the church when my children were young, “Pray for my children to grow up loving Jesus and the church.” Unless something was heavy on my heart, this was always my response anytime I was asked, “How can I pray for your family?” My children love Jesus and the church. Both Josh and Nick married young ladies who love the church.

Josh and Kate, as well as Nick and Meredith, will raise children who love Jesus and the church, beginning with Peyton.

Josh and Nick knew they came before the church, yet they also knew of my great love for the church and responsibility as the pastor of their church. When Josh was experiencing a *once-in-a-lifetime opportunity* to play in the 13-year-old World Series, I did not preach or attend a Sunday night service which I had been scheduled to do. I announced it accordingly on that Sunday morning. This was before it was cool to do such and to miss Sunday night church. Equally, the only game I ever remember missing was when I was asked to preach to Promise Keepers in Washington, D.C., before a million men. I almost chose not to do it, but a friend advised me to talk to my boys and ask them what they thought I should do. Both immediately said, “Go do

that!” Parents now are going to the “extreme” and have become very unbalanced in this area. In all they let their children do, they violate church on Sundays. This is dramatically impacting churches, but will also have major negative consequences on their family. I am convinced of it!

Another way to show the value of the church is to tell your children that they receive enormous benefits from being your children. They meet people that most people would never meet and at times experience valuable things that most would never experience. So tell them along the way, “You receive some great benefits because you are a child of a minister, so remember that when you think you may have to give up something because of it.”

Concerning church issues, communicate wisely about these with your children. I rarely spoke of any in front of the children and if so, it was only when they were older and we prayed about them as a family.

As a minister, you would do well to have your spouse read this chapter. In fact, have her read it and then talk through it together. Both of you need to understand clearly that your children will catch what you feel, say, and live before them about church. Be careful. Be wise.

VALUE MENTORING WITH GENTLE ACCOUNTABILITY

Teach your children to walk with Christ. Teach your children how to have a daily time with God. Start when they first begin to read words. My boys have had time with God daily since they were very young. They still do today.

Train your children to be leaders. It all starts when they are children. Mentor them to lead and influence others to the degree of their God-given giftedness.

Mentor them in their relationships with friends and then with dating. Do not let them become culture-driven, but encourage them in a godly way to be different if God calls them to be different in something. There were all kinds of relationships where I would at times intervene with my children. I would call a time-out, we would reconsider, and redirect them to other relationships. When Jeana or I did not have peace about something, we would intervene. Why? We knew if Satan captured our children, it would happen through their friends or their dating relationships.

In the early days of having children, I determined I was not running for parenting, but I was already elected. I was accountable to God for my children. Therefore, with gentleness (tamed strength), I would provide accountability. God used both Jeana and I to provide balance in all of those challenges, which were few because the standard was very clear and continually communicated to the boys early on in life.

VALUE CONSISTENCY

Consistency builds godly children. Inconsistency builds the opposite. You must be consistent in your leadership as a parent. You must be consistent in your discipline. Never give up being consistent.

Be honest with your children consistently. Do not play games, trying to get them to guess what you want them to do. You will

mess up and make mistakes. When you do, come clean, admit it, and ask their forgiveness. If something happens in your marriage in front of your children, ask them to forgive you.

Be consistent in your schedule with them. Attempt to set a time you will all be together weekly. As our boys got older, this became more difficult, but we made Saturday lunch a time when we would always go out somewhere or stay at home and watch a football game together. As well, we hung out with various families after church on Sunday nights by going out to a light dinner before going home. We made Sunday night church an experience by doing this. My point is, be consistent in what you do and what you say.

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VALUE COMMUNICATION

Build a climate with your children where they can tell you anything. This means you let them finish without interruption or explosion. Always affirm that you love them unconditionally. I still tell my children, “I love you.” I still kiss them on the cheek or the neck, as well as embrace them. I let them know early on that they did not have a bigger cheerleader than me. I believe beyond “I love you,” the greatest words a dad can say to his children are the words, “I believe in you.” This has built into my children the desire to talk with me almost every day. I still tell them, “I believe in you.”

Communicate with the church about your children on a limited basis. I never lifted my children up because I felt it put them under the microscope even more. In fact, it was not until recently that I even taught on parenting because I did not want them under the gun. If I did, I qualified it first. I limited illustrations about them in my speaking because it just heightened the scrutiny. Please be wise in these areas. Your people will resent you and your children if you talk about them too much publicly and privately. Let another's words bring praise to them.

VALUE VACATIONS

Time away through the year is valuable to your family. In those early years, it was limited due to finances. I believe it is also important that as your children grow up you ensure that every vacation is not going to be spent with other family. They need time with you away from others.

We established in those early years the Floyd Family Fun Fund! The boys were laughing about it recently. Anytime I realized any "extra money," we placed it into this account. Why? In order that we could have a vacation that was away and as nice as resources would permit.

We attempted to go away on Spring Break week, one week in the summer, and usually the week between Christmas and New Year's. The summer trip was usually our biggest trip that we saved for and looked forward to the most. Spring Break was usually with a church group skiing in Colorado, and Christmas time we would spend with family.

Your children are not always going to be a part of your daily life. Therefore, while you have your children at home, value vacations. Remember in your marriage (meaning you had better take care of business in that relationship), your children will leave one day and you will be left with only your spouse. That will be great if your relationship with your spouse is healthy. We have loved every stage of life and have attempted to make each one very positive.

ONE MORE TIME

Please understand that I do not live in a perfect world. We are not perfect and do not have perfect children or a perfect grandchild. However, what we do have is a healthy family, a family full of love and grace. We want to be together.

I believe this can occur for any minister and his family if he values the right things. Just one more time to set the record straight: *Building Your Family Is More Important Than Building Your Church!* It is only possible by God's grace, prayer, and a lot of hard work. You will never regret doing it, so build your family!

Remember: *“If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God’s church?”*

(1 Tim. 3:5).