

NEW LIFE FOR THE PASTOR'S WIFE



by Kay Kuzma, Ed.D.
President, Family Matters, Inc.

A course designed to explore personal fulfillment, marriage, and children in the life of a pastor's wife in order to solve conflict, promote growth, and maximize potential.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Kay Kuzma is the founder and president of Family Matters, an organization dedicated to strengthening the family. She has authored numerous books on child guidance and family relationships, including *A Hug and a Kiss and a Kick in the Pants*, *Building Your Child's Character From the Inside Out*, *When You're Serious About Love: Straight Talk to Single Adults*, and *Working Mothers*. Dr. Kuzma holds a doctorate in early childhood education from UCLA with special emphasis in family relations and parenting concerns. A popular women's speaker, she has appeared on numerous radio and television programs and is a former nursery school director and university professor.

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The CDs that accompany this study guide were recorded at a live seminar Dr. Kay Kuzma held for pastors' wives at a conference workers' meeting. Sandy Goldenberg, a pastor's wife who attended those meetings, felt strongly that this information should be given to others, and volunteered to edit the seminar. Her work is greatly appreciated.

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INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Listen to the CD** for each session while following along in the study guide and taking notes as you listen. (Note: The CDs were recorded at a live seminar and don't necessarily cover every point in the study guide.)
2. **Complete the study guide questions.** After listening to the CDs, go back and read the study guide, answering the questions and completing all the assignments.
3. **Read one book that will help you be a better pastor's wife.** There is no required textbook for this course, but the student is required to read at least one book that is related to the topic of study. For suggested resources, see page 27. If you find a book that better fills your needs, you may substitute that book.

INTRODUCTION

In most professions there are very few expectations of wives in regard to their husbands' jobs. You may refer to the doctor's wife or the mechanic's wife, but only in terms of clarifying the relationship identity of a person, not in terms of performance or role expectations.

That is not true for pastors' wives—and that's why so many find themselves pushed and pulled to become someone different from who they are. For decades the stereotype role for a pastor's wife was that she should play the piano! How foolish! Thankfully, we are moving away from that expectation, but other expectations persist within various churches, such as expecting the pastor's wife to teach Sabbath School, be a telephone counselor, help with fellowship meals, or be a greeter at church.

Trying to be something you are not naturally gifted to be takes psychological energy, and discouragement can easily set in. If these thoughts are allowed to fester and grow, it's easy to become bitter and resentful. The next step is to blame your husband, the church, and, ultimately, God. For many pastors' wives, escape seems the only answer. But that is not a healthy way to solve the problem.

How much better to become the person God created you to be. The fact that your husband happens to be the pastor shouldn't change who *you* are. You don't have to be what others expect. You *do* need to support your husband in his chosen profession—just as other wives support their husbands. And you must recognize that your husband's profession has some unique risks: he may find himself vulnerable to criticism, he may receive unwanted admiration from various women, or he may constantly work overtime trying to do a job that's never "done." But you don't have to let the tail (the fact that your husband is a pastor) wag the dog (you)!

That's why this study guide with the accompanying set of CDs has been prepared for you.

My prayer is that you will find fulfillment in your life, in your marriage, and with your children, and that you will become the person God created you to be.

Sincerely,
Kay Kuzma

NEW LIFE FOR THE PASTOR'S WIFE

By Dr. Kay Kuzma

Session 1: Personal Fulfillment

Finding your niche when you don't play the piano!

Who are you? (Write down the first three answers that come to mind.)

What is your role in the church? (List all of them.)

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How do you feel about the following statements? (Write your reaction under each statement.)

Statement #1

"A minister's wife should be a co-pastor, social worker, visiting nurse, an educator, an evangelist dedicated to saving souls. And, if possible, [Sabbath School] superintendent and leader of neighborhood study groups. . . .

"Let her feel she has wedded herself to her husband's parish and the best interest of his flock. Thrice fortunate the Christian female who is permitted to consecrate her life . . . to the service of God and Savior. She shall receive a crown of glory" (*Hints for a Clergyman's Wife*, 1832, by an anonymous British author prescribing Puritan rules for ministers' wives).

Reaction:

Statement #2:

“You are a personalized gift to your husband, not to his job. Your husband is God’s gift to the church.”

Reaction:

Statement #3:

“As a woman in a key position in the church you dare not minimize your role. Like it or not, what you are and the manner in which you conduct yourself will reflect upon your husband. You are an extension of what his ministry represents. Many times those with whom you are in contact will judge your husband’s character and ministry by your reputation. I know of no other profession which places spouses under a greater load, in respect to actions, than does the ministry” (Ruthe White, *What Every Pastor’s Wife Should Know*, p. 18).

Reaction:

Statement #4:

“What you do in the church is not as important as the spirit in which you do it. If you find it a joy to serve, chances are you are following the Holy Spirit’s pathway for your life. When you do things only out of a sense of obligation because you think it is your duty, you will find yourself resenting the job, your church, your husband—and, possibly, God.”

Reaction:

How can you separate YOU as a person from the role you must play as a pastor’s wife (PW)?

Here are typical questions from PWs: (After determining your own answers, see if you agree with the answers given at the end of this session.)

1. How do I maintain my individuality as a PW?
2. Is it necessary for me to always travel with him?
3. Is it OK to have a personal friend within the church?

4. Whom do I confide in when I need someone trustworthy?
5. How do I deal with flirtatious women?
6. Is it OK to sometimes take a Sabbath off to visit another church?
7. What offices should I hold in the church?
8. Am I always obligated to eat at others' homes or go to every social gathering?
9. Should I try to improve on public speaking, praying, some musical area, or in holding Bible studies?
10. Should my home always be open to others?
11. How do I say "no" without making people feel that I'm shirking my responsibilities as a PW?
12. How can we take time off without feeling guilty that we are not meeting someone's need? Someone is always dying or getting married right in the middle of our vacation!
13. If I have a church school in my town but it doesn't meet my child's needs, what should I do?
14. What do I do when I find myself resenting my role as a PW?
15. What if my own husband doesn't understand the conflict I'm going through?

Now add your own questions to this list. Talk with other pastors' wives for possible answers and write them under your question.

16. _____

17. _____

18. _____

19. _____

20. _____

Step 1: Living an incredible life

You are an incredible person whether church members think so or not. What does it mean to be incredible?

- 1. It means to be significantly different (doing the uncommon). Read Romans 12:9-21 in *The Living Bible* or another modern version and write down the directives given.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

- 2. It means to be so filled with God's love that anything is possible. Do you believe what it says in Mark 10:27, Luke 18:27, Mark 9:23, Mark 14:36, Matthew 17:20, Luke 1:37, Matthew 19:26? Why do you believe the way you do?

Step 2: Feeling valuable

Avoid the comparison trap. Why do you think the following counsel is given?

“When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise” (2 Corinthians 10:12, NIV).

When you compare yourself with someone else, how does it usually make you feel about yourself? About others?

What's the difference between self-worth and pride?

Finding your value:

1. Self-image

- What image do you want to portray on the job?
- In church?
- How should you dress to portray the image you want to have?
- If you haven't already done so, invest in a color and hairstyle analysis (optional for course).
- Develop a self-image improvement plan.
- How do you feel about getting plastic surgery, contacts, teeth straightened, etc.?

Write your plan here:

2. Self-esteem

- Find friends who reflect that you are an OK person. What do they do that makes you feel OK?
- What is the relationship between a social network and longevity? (The answer is on the CDs.)

3. Self-confidence

- What new skills would you like to develop?
- Have you considered educational or career training?
- If so, in what area?
- Make specific plans and discuss these with your husband. Record the results of your discussion here.

4. Self-respect

Live according to God's principles. Write the basic principle of each of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17). Also record how these principles can be made practical in your own life.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

- Reject perfectionism. Why is a spirit of perfectionism harmful to you, to your family, and to the church?
- Know what you believe and what you value and live accordingly.

What five things do you feel strongly about? How are these reflected in your life?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____

5. God's value of you.

Accept what God says about your value. You are valuable because:

- a. God created you (Psalm 139:13-16).
- b. God knew you and what you would become before your birth (Jeremiah 1:5).
- c. Jesus died to save you. In fact, He would have died just for you (John 3:16; 1 John 3:16).
- d. God is preparing a home in heaven for you (John 14:1-3).
- e. God calls you his "daughter" (1 John 3:1).
- f. You are to be Jesus' bride (Revelation 21:9).
- g. God needs you to represent His character to the universe (Job 1:6-12).
- h. Christ changes our lives—covers our "filthy-rag-righteousness" with His robe of righteousness (Isaiah 64:6).

Look up and read the following texts. Then record the general idea of each text.

Psalms 8:3-5 _____

Psalms 139:1-3, 14, 17, 18 _____

Jeremiah 31:3 _____

Matthew 17:20 _____

Luke 15:8-10 _____

Galatians 2:20 _____

Philippians 3:21 _____

Philippians 4:13 _____

1 John 3:2, 24 _____

1 John 5:19 _____

How do you feel about your personal value after reading these texts?

Step 3: Helping others feel valuable

After each item, please record an instance when you used this method with someone. What was the person's reaction?

1. Listened _____
2. Respected the other's ideas, feelings, values _____
3. Included others so no one felt left out _____
4. Helped others feel important to a group _____
5. Encouraged and supported another person's independent decisions _____
6. Helped others develop skills and abilities _____
7. Acknowledged small successes _____
8. Recognized and admired the other's contributions _____
9. Mentioned good qualities frequently _____
10. Visited others in their homes _____
11. Wrote notes of appreciation and encouragement _____
12. Worked, played, and/or laughed together _____

Step 4: Learning how to handle criticism

True or false: (circle your answer)

“Unless you are willing to risk criticism, rejection, and failure, you will never really live. To live is to risk.”

Why did you give the answer that you did?

When criticized, try the following:

1. Try not to look like you are offended. A smile will mask your initial hurt feelings—and a touch will help even more.
2. Never act defensive. Look like you are interested in learning whatever will help you to be a better person.
3. If you feel this encounter may take some time and you are rushed, or if you feel this is not the place to have this conversation, say, “I am very interested in what you want to tell me, but I have an appointment in ten minutes.” Or, “I think we would both be more comfortable if we could sit down rather than standing in the busy hallway.” Or, “Could we set a time when we could talk without interruption?” (smile)
4. Show appreciation. Say, “Thank you for being so interested in me that you would share your concerns. I know it takes courage to confront another person.”
5. Make sure you have understood correctly. It makes people feel that they have really been listened to (and it may cut the conversation short) if you say, “Now, I want to make sure I understand what you are telling me. I hear you saying. . . .” If they agree that you heard them correctly, merely smile and say, “Thank you for sharing.” And if you don’t want to continue the conversation, say, “I’ve got to go now, but I’ll see you next Sabbath. Have a good week.”
6. Clarify. If clarification is needed, ask permission. Say, “Would you be interested in my ideas or another viewpoint?” If they say yes, then reassure them, “These are just ideas so I don’t expect you to automatically agree with them. It’s important that we have different viewpoints and can respect each other’s opinions. That’s what makes living in God’s family so interesting. We can feel free to express what’s on our mind, but we don’t have to argue with each other. . . . And I want you to understand that just because I’m sharing another point of view, it doesn’t make your opinion any less valuable. What you have said is important!”
7. If there is strong emotion on the other person’s part, don’t waste your time trying to set the record straight. They won’t hear you. Wait for an unemotional time. Just say, “When you aren’t feeling so upset, I’ll be happy to tell you what really happened.”
8. Don’t get caught in the trap of listening to someone criticize your husband. Cut them off immediately and say, “Please don’t say any more, because you’re telling the wrong person. I hope you feel comfortable telling my husband these things. He has a right to know how his actions or words affected you. It’s my policy not to share criticism secondhand, so it really won’t do you any good to tell me.”
9. When they criticize your kids, admit, “It’s not easy to raise children. I can use all the help I can get.” At other times you may need to say phrases like this: “Every child is different. What works with one doesn’t always work with another, but I’m willing to try new ideas.” “I’m interested in learning more about what you are saying. Do you have a good book I

can read?” “Please pray for our family. It’s not easy to be a pastor’s kid, and our kids are no exception.” “Sometimes kids need time and space to grow. But most of all they need friends who understand and will listen. I hope you’ll take time to get better acquainted with my boy. Encourage him, won’t you?”

10. Determine the validity of the criticism. Think about it carefully. Pray for God to help you accept the changes that you may need to make. Determine to make those changes. Make specific plans for change.
11. Bury criticism. There are two ways: 1) For valid criticism that has been helpful, you may want to thank that person and tell them what changes have been made. This brings closure to the encounter. 2) For invalid criticism—forget it. Every time your mind thinks about it, force yourself to think of something pleasant: sing a song, take a nap, play tennis—just don’t dwell on it!

List other suggestions:

12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____

Using the principles above, role play with a friend the following situations where someone comes up to you and says . . .

- “I think it’s a shame you never come and help with Community Services. The last pastor’s wife was really involved, and it was so encouraging to the rest of us to work with her. It’s hard to expect church members to volunteer for things like this when no one from the pastor’s family ever volunteers.”
- “I heard you tell Mrs. Johnson something about the Bennetts’ breaking up. I don’t think you should be spreading things like that when you really don’t know for sure, and even if you did, coming from the pastor’s wife it is just not very appropriate.”
- “I watched your teenage daughter in church, and she was not only holding hands with the boy she was with, but she was also patting and snuggling up to him. It was hardly appropriate behavior for the public, let alone church. It was really distracting.”
- “I don’t like jokes from the pulpit. I think it’s entirely out of place. We are in church to worship, not to laugh. What do you think?”

Step 5: Praying for a mission

Do you already have a personal and family mission? If not . . .

- What would you really like to do in life? (Brainstorm ideas as if you had no family commitment.)

- Consider the following list of spiritual gifts found in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4. Circle your spiritual gifts.

Serving	Teaching	Encouraging
Giving	Leading/administration	Mercy
Evangelists	Helpers	Healers
Apostles	Prophets	Wisdom
Knowledge	Faith	Discernment

- Circle the other gifts listed below that you are currently using in serving others. Check those you would like to use more.

Appreciation	Counseling	Visiting
Sympathy	Working with children	Friendliness
Listening	Imagination/creativity	Courage
Supporting	Hospitality	Kindness
Loyalty	Courtesy	Understanding
Tolerance	Experience	Influence
Good will	Pleasing personality	Hope
Cooperation	Diplomacy	Sharing

- What are your natural talents and interests?

Artistic	Memory	Mechanical
Musical	Nature	Philosophy
Money management	Organizational skills	Bible study
Entertaining	Social skills	Decorating
Landscaping	Secretarial	Computer
Writing	Receptionist/greeter	Information
History	Crafts	Camping
Speaker	Seminar leader	Bible studies
Women's ministries	Children's ministries	Daycare
Janitor	Painter	Repairs
Prayer chain	Intercessory prayer	Teacher

Gerontology	Disabled	Singles
Parenting	Health/sports	Banquets
Visiting shut-ins	Wedding coordinator	Talent shows

- What are your strengths?

- Considering your family commitments and your gifts, talents, interests, and strengths, what do you think your personal mission might be?

- What about a family mission? List ideas:

Questions pastors' wives (PW) ask and suggested answers:

1. *How do I maintain my individuality as a PW?*

With your husband, define as specifically as possible what you both feel your PW role should be. Now put your unique self into that role and don't try to fulfill that role the same way Pastor X's wife would. In addition, do what *you* are called to do, which may not necessarily have anything to do with whom you married.

2. *Is it necessary for me to always travel with him?*

No, but consider the benefits of couple ministry.

3. *Is it OK to have a personal friend within the church?*

Yes, but don't make it so obvious that it would create envy. A safety valve would be to have many "best" friends in the church. Why not become best friends with another PW in your town?

4. *Whom do I confide in when I need someone trustworthy?*

Talk to another, perhaps older, pastor's wife whom you respect—one who has experience with these issues and who is somewhat of a role model for you. Be up front with her and let her know that you are seeking her counsel in absolute confidence. Also ask her to not mention your conversation to her husband. Also, ask the conference for counseling. You don't have to tell a conference official the problem; just say you are searching for answers in order to have a more effective ministry, and you have some personal concerns you need to discuss with someone in confidence. Request a PW advocate from the Shepherdess organization at the General Conference or local division office.

5. *How do I deal with flirtatious women?*

Pray for them.

Be friendly and compliment them. Sometimes their flirtatious behavior is only a bid for attention.

Be open by sharing your feelings with your husband. Many men are not aware of what is happening and how their own actions may be misinterpreted by others. If it's obvious to a wife, you can be sure it's obvious to others.

If the problem continues, discuss with your husband which one of you will confront the person. Many times the flirtatious woman is not aware of what she is doing. Simply say, "It makes me feel uncomfortable when you grab my hand (or my husband's hand) like this (or wink at me or whatever the flirtatious behavior might be), and I thought you ought to know. I want you to be friendly, but I'm afraid your behavior could easily be misunderstood by others. Thanks for understanding."

6. *Is it OK to sometimes take a Sabbath off to visit another church?*

Yes. You can bring home so many neat ideas and enrich your own service by visiting other churches.

7. *What offices should I hold in the church?*

Only those you feel called to perform.

Limit your offices so others can have a chance to serve. Don't overload yourself. Serving the church should be a joy, not an obligation. For unfilled offices, organize the church to begin praying that God will raise up a person for the job. Sometimes getting a non-member involved paves the way for his or her choosing to become a member.

8. *Am I always obligated to eat at others' homes or go to every social gathering?*

No. Make it a point to never accept a social invitation until you both have a chance to discuss how this will affect your previous plans. Simply say, "Thank you for the invitation. My husband and I sit down every Sunday evening and work out our plans for the week. I'll call you on Monday to say whether we are able to come or not. And regardless, I want you to know how pleased I am that you thought of inviting us."

It sometimes helps if you have a policy that you don't take any invitations on "family" evenings. Then all you have to say is, "I'm sorry, that is our family evening, and we have made other arrangements."

9. *Should I try to improve on public speaking, praying, some musical area, or in holding Bible studies?*

Only if the Holy Spirit is nudging you in that direction.

10. *Should my home always be open to others?*

No. Your home is your private place. There should be someone in the church, however, who is designated to meet others' needs. Look for the person with the gift of hospitality.

Read *Open Heart, Open Home* by Karen Mains and pray about what God is calling you to do in this respect.

11. *How do I say "no" without making people feel that I'm shirking my responsibilities as a PW?*

Make it a policy to never accept any new responsibility immediately. Tell them you will pray about their request and talk it over with your husband and get back to them. If God and your husband say "no," that's pretty hard for them to argue with!

12. *How can we take time off without feeling guilty that we are not meeting someone's need? Someone is always dying or getting married right in the middle of our vacation!*

This is a difficult question. Someone will always need you. Announce your vacation early and have it passed by the church board. This won't prevent someone from dying during your vacation, but it does pave the way to respond to less urgent needs by simply saying, "We will be out of town on those dates."

13. *If you have a church school in your town, but it doesn't meet your child's needs, what should you do?*

Your child's needs must come first.

Actively work through the school board to begin upgrading the church school so that in the future it can meet special needs. Be as supportive of the church school as if your child were attending. (Go to programs, pledge to the building fund, volunteer your services, etc.)

14. *What do I do when I find myself resenting my role as PW?*

Make some changes in your life. Negative emotions are there for a reason: to help you recognize that something isn't right and to motivate you to make the necessary changes so the negative emotion will go away.

Determine why you are resenting your role. (You may need the help of a counselor to get the answers you need.)

- Resentments from your childhood
- Unfulfilled marriage expectations
- Lack of appreciation
- Burnout
- Problems with children
- Frustration because you aren't using your God-given talents
- Feelings that others are controlling your life, leaving you with no choices
- Criticism from others
- Don't see any results from your efforts
- Trying to fill an unrealistic role expectation
- Conflicting pressures for your time
- Guilt caused by having to look good on the outside when you feel like you are falling apart on the inside

Instead of running away, work on solving the problems causing the resentment.

15. *What if my husband doesn't understand the conflict I'm going through?*

He has a problem!

Just like the persistent person who kept knocking until he woke his friend and received something for his guest to eat (Luke 1:5-8), you must keep knocking to wake him up. You must get your husband's attention. Make your position clear. Tell him you are seeking help with or without his approval and cooperation—but you would rather have both.

Go for help! Every woman deserves a counselor. It's your right—and your privilege. And what if you can't afford it? If you had a brain tumor, you would get the help you need. Resentment that won't go away is every bit as dangerous as a brain tumor. Don't let it destroy you, your marriage, or your relationship with the church or God.

NOTES:

Session 2: Marriage

How to be #1 in your husband's life when he's married to the church!

Step 1: Make your husband #1 in your life

How do you feel about the following statements?

"I have only one project: he is my husband."—Mrs. Norman Vincent (Ruth Stafford) Peale

Comment: _____

"It is not our business to convert our husbands; we are only to love them."—Mrs. Billy (Ruth) Graham

Comment: _____

"My husband is still first priority, my children are second, and all other assignments and projects . . . are handled in third, fourth, and fifth place."—Mrs. Robert (Arvella) Schuller

Comment: _____

If you were asked to make a statement on the importance of your husband and his role as a minister in relationship to your life, what would you say?

Step 2: Make your time together meaningful

1 point: Thinking about the other

2 points: Being together

3 points: Talking

4 points: Looking

5 points: Touching

Plan a 5-point homecoming and record your experience (listen to the CDs for ideas):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Step 3: Talk, talk, talk . . .

Ask your husband each morning, "What do you need from me today?" and then tell him what you need from him. Keep a record, for one week, of the needs you share.

	Husband's needs	Your needs
Day 1:	_____	_____
Day 2:	_____	_____
Day 3:	_____	_____
Day 4:	_____	_____
Day 5:	_____	_____
Day 6:	_____	_____
Day 7:	_____	_____

How did this daily sharing affect your relationship?

Levels of communication:

- Feelings
- Ideas and opinions
- Reporting
- Clicheing

Why is the communication of feelings so important in a marriage?

Write an "I feel" statement:

I feel _____

when _____

because _____

When your husband shows a negative feeling, share a "you feel" statement. Write it down and record his reaction.

You feel _____

Other ways to say "You feel. . . ." Give examples of each of the following:

Acknowledgements _____

Silence _____

Body language _____

Rephrasing _____

Step 4: Practice unconditional love or non-manipulative acceptance

Watch your criticism.

Watch your emotions.

Step 5: Do things together (write down what you enjoy doing most with your husband)

Step 6: Do the unexpected—surprise him

Make a "why not" list. Write three ideas below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Write him love notes.

Plan a picnic, regardless of the time of year or place.

Start a book of memories.

Step 7: Open doors of possibility for him

Write down one idea.

Step 8: Plan a celebration

Plan a second honeymoon

Plan an anniversary celebration

Plan a metri-versary (every 100 days) celebration

Plan a birthday party

Step 9: Be sexually exciting

Don't be afraid to initiate lovemaking. If you need some creative ideas, read an article or book on the subject. (This is optional for the course, but if you read something meaningful, mention it here.)

Step 10: Go for a 15-minute walk together each day

Please feel free to list other ideas of how to be #1 in your husband's life.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

Ideas to Share with Your Husband

Discuss the following questions with your husband. Every true answer indicates that you (or your husband) may be in the process of leaving your family . . .

- 1. Have you been married for at least five years and do you have two or more children?
- 2. Do you spend less than 15 minutes per day talking to your spouse about non-job-related topics?
- 3. Do you or your mate frequently work overtime? Or are you not home when expected?
- 4. Are you inaccessible to the family via telephone when you are away from home?
- 5. When you are upset and are suffering job-related stress, do you bottle up your feelings or take them out on the family?
- 6. Are your family meals and sharing time frequently interrupted with calls relating to business or non-family activities?
- 7. Do you frequently have to cancel plans with the family because of work, church, or other commitments?
- 8. Do you work on your own projects or attend meetings or conferences while on family vacations?

9. Has it been more than a year since you and your spouse took a private romantic vacation?
10. Do your major goals for the future center around yourself or your husband's career rather than on your family?
11. Do you feel you are being taken for granted either by your children, your husband, or your church?
12. Do you find yourself resenting the role as a pastor's wife?

Based on your answers, what changes would you like to see you and your husband make?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

On the next several pages is an article, which you may want to give your husband. After reading the article, make up your own list of what would make you feel cherished, and also share this list with your husband. Record his reactions.

Twelve “Pastoral” Ways to Cherish a Wife

By Kay Kuzma

How would you like to make your wife feel like the most special person in the world without having to spend a fortune? Sounds interesting, doesn't it? No one can do it quite like a husband. All you have to do is put the following twelve suggestions into practice, and I guarantee your wife will feel like a million. I also guarantee that your marriage satisfaction will make your life brighter than gold!

1. *Sacrifice for her.* Be willing to give up something you would like or something that you would like to do in order to please her. Give her the biggest piece of pie, the last chocolate in the box, the keys to your new car, or your comfy chair.

Most men nobly boast that they would sacrifice their lives for their wives, but they wouldn't think of giving up baseball with their buddies for a walk on the beach with their brides! Would you sacrifice a committee meeting? What about a church social? Would you sacrifice a phone call that comes in the middle of dinner, if you knew your wife didn't appreciate being disturbed unnecessarily? Just how much have you sacrificed for your wife lately?

2. *Listen to her.* Accept what she says. Look interested. Don't nag. Give her plenty of eyeball-to-eyeball communication—the same kind you give to everyone else who sits opposite your desk.

Your wife needs your ear—not just your heart. Be willing to listen to her throughout your day and not just at 11:55 p.m. when your brain has already gone to bed and your body is struggling to get there!

Remember that when your wife has an emotional need, she doesn't need a sermon: “Well, no wonder you're feeling down. You should eat a good breakfast and this wouldn't happen.” I know you love to preach—but God has called you to reform the church, not your wife. Please resist the temptation to preach to her. Just listen—really listen.

3. *Touch her.* Most women enjoy the gentle touch of their husbands when they are in public, as well as in the home. Hold her hand. Put your arm around her waist. You don't have to make a public spectacle of yourself, just let your touch show others that your primary interest is centered on your wife.

If you are unsure about how much public affection she feels comfortable about, ask her.

If you are not a “touchy” type of person, you may have to make yourself reach out to your wife. Start by making it a practice to always hold her hand when you pray. When you are sitting next to her, put your arm over the back of the chair and give her a squeeze. Before you start to drive, reach over and put your hand on her knee and ask for God's protection. Being a pastor's wife is often a cold, thankless job; she needs a warm, affectionate husband, and this is something you can learn how to be!

4. *Be with her in public.* Don't leave her alone in a crowd in order to talk to people you are interested in. Be seen together. I know some pastors who are so busy with their parishioners on Sabbath that they almost never see their wives. That's not right!

Of course you are busy, but that doesn't mean you can't excuse yourself for a few minutes to go find her, give her a little affectionate pat and tell her you'll be another hour. Or, if she is not busy with the kids, include her in the discussions you are having. Or find a babysitter so she can join you. Just make it a policy that whenever possible you counsel together. You may be surprised how much more effective you can be when she's by your side. Good wives make better husbands.

One of the most thoughtful things I ever observed was a pastor when he stopped besides his wife's pew and waited for her to join him as he continued down the aisle after the sermon. Then they stood together at the door and greeted everyone as they walked out. I have a feeling your wife might like to walk down the aisle with you once again. Have you asked her?

5. *Say kind things about her in public.* Never criticize. Never demean. Uplift. If you say enough kind things about your wife, she is bound to overhear them occasionally—or they're bound to get back to her. Public support of each other is as important as private support to the husband and wife in ministry.
6. *Share her responsibilities.* Ask her what she would like you to do for her. Surprise her with your thoughtfulness. It's easy for a pastor to get so used to the role of delegating responsibilities that he forgets he needs to do some volunteer work himself around the house.

One marriage counselor said there would seldom be a divorce if couples would just learn to say at the beginning of the day, "What do you need from me today?" Or "What can I do to make you happy today?" Meeting each other's needs means making the bed and cleaning the toilet occasionally.

7. *Let her know you admire her.* Tell her how attractive she is, how talented, how kind. Admire her body—and her personality. When is the last time you winked at your wife, or whistled? You're too old? I don't believe that! The only excuse I'll accept is if your eyelids droop permanently or your teeth are no longer where they ought to be.

Look at the bride of your youth and see her beauty and tell her each day at least one thing you really admire about her. See if she doesn't become even more beautiful.

8. *Show respect.* It's not old-fashioned to open doors for your wife and to carry things for her. And even if it were, women love "old-fashioned" men.

If you really respect her, you'll call when you're going to be late, you won't work every night of the week, you'll take your wife out on a special date at least once a month, and you'll tell her before bringing home a houseful of company.

9. *Be an understanding father.* There has been many a pastor's wife complain, "Why does he say all the right things when he's behind the pulpit and have a sudden lapse of memory when he walks in the front door. If he'd only listen to his own sermons, he'd be a wonderful father." If you find yourself not being able to put into practice what you preach, you need help. Saving your children is your primary mission. Even the chairman of the church board or the conference president will agree with that statement.

Don't let a conflict with your child cause tension in your marriage. It's not worth it. Get counseling. And don't tell me you can't because there are no Christian counselors where you live. A counselor doesn't have to be Christian to help you. There are many wonderful, moral counselors who don't happen to be Christian. God may want you to witness to this person. He may need this counselor in His work, and the only way he or she is going to learn about salvation is through you!

And don't try to tell me you couldn't go to counseling because you are afraid of what the church members might say if they thought you were going to a shrink. Your church family will understand. They will. They will think more of you for getting the help you need. Just say, "I wasn't born a parent, and it's very important that I learn effective parenting skills so I can train up my children in the way God wants them to go. I'm getting the help I need. Please pray for me that I will be able to put what I'm learning into practice."

And if a few members criticize you, don't pay any attention to them. They are probably criticizing everything else you do, too!

10. *Open doors for your wife.* Don't just think of your own career and advancement. What about hers? Is there anything you could do to help her be better able to fulfill her God-given potential? Why don't you make an appointment with your wife and discuss this question.

You have been called to the ministry. You have gone to school to prepare for your work. You are the pastor. But just because you have been called to the ministry, it doesn't mean that your wife has. Yes, she is committed to standing by your side in whatever you choose to do and being your helpmate, but God may have a special mission for her to fulfill, and she may need you for a helpmate, too.

If your wife wants to go back to school, you should help her formulate a plan so she can do this. Even if the kids are young, she can get books at the library and begin studying in her chosen field. Also consider online and correspondence schools, such as Griggs University.

Don't make the excuse that there is no money. Look at your budget once again. What could you give up for your wife? If you could save just \$10 per week, that's \$520 she would have for tuition next year.

Your marriage satisfaction is bound to increase when your wife is feeling fulfilled in her personal life. Why not open a door of possibility for her?

11. *Take time to be alone with her.* Take her on romantic weekend trip. No kids! You arrange the babysitting, for a change, and you do the packing. Make this an annual affair.

I know one church that delights in surprising their pastor a couple times a year by dangling in front of him a check for gas and food and the key to a hotel room or condo in some nearby—or not so nearby—resort area. Their message is, "Go. We know you will be a better pastor if you take an occasional break with your wife." (You might just want to share this idea with the head elder. If not, your wife would probably be happy to do so.)

Believe it or not, you can get away occasionally on a weekend. In fact, you might be surprised how well the church members can get along without you. And, like growing kids, they might even enjoy their “freedom”!

12. *Be the spiritual leader of your family.* Did you know that in one study, women felt that the biggest fault of men was what they termed a “religious shirker”? Don’t let this be your fault! How can it be? You are the pastor.

Getting paid for pastoring a church isn’t an insurance policy for spirituality. I’ve heard of great pastors who get temporary amnesia at home. They never pray. They never lead out in family worship. A pastor might even forget about the Ten Commandments and be found glued to Monday night football and Sunday afternoon sports and everything in between (commandment #1). Or maybe he occasionally swears (commandment #3), neglects his folks even though they live in the next town (commandment #5), screams angry words at the kids for not obeying (commandment #6 according to Jesus’ interpretation in Matthew 5:21, 22), takes quarters out of his kid’s piggy bank (commandment #8), lies about a child’s age when trying to enter an amusement park (commandment #9), or even covets the neighbor’s Porsche (commandment #10).

You can’t live a double agent’s life and expect to keep the love of your wife alive. Being the spiritual goody-goody at church and the bad guy at home just doesn’t set well. Who is the real you? You must decide, and clean up your act at home. And when you do, and when you become the true spiritual leader of your family, your wife will love it!

Well, there you have it—my prescription for “pastorally” cherishing your wife and increasing your own marital happiness. And if you are tempted to say, “There’s no hope for us; nothing would ever change my wife,” just remember, you only get out of a marriage what you are willing to put into it.

Session 3: Children

Living in the pleasant tense with preschoolers, plus!

The importance of a positive spirit

Attitudes . . .

. . . shape behavior and have predictive power.

“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Proverbs 23:7

. . . are contagious.

“A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” Galatians 5:9

. . . affect the health.

“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.”

Proverbs 17:22

Ideas for how to find a positive in what most would consider a negative for children:

<u>Negative</u>	<u>Positive</u>
Hearing people's problems	Have a broader view of life
Constant exposure to evangelism	Greater desire to share truth
Frequent moving	See more of the world and make new friends
High moral expectations	Friends don't tempt them to do questionable things if they expect them to be good
Stigma of PK	Give status and privilege;
	Get to know church leaders
Expected to lead out	Learn leadership skills

Now add some negatives of your own and come up with something positive for each:

<u>Negative</u>	<u>Positive</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Tips for Raising PKs (read the article in Appendix A)

1. Let kids be themselves. Don't give them an image against which they have to rebel.
2. Praise them. Make your praise specific. Share how you feel.
3. Give them space.
4. Take time to talk to your kids.
5. Make your home fit your kids and not your kids fit the parsonage.
6. Lengthen the apron strings—allow your kids to grow toward independence on their own timetable, not yours.
7. Teach them to be polite though not perfect.
8. Never discipline in public.
9. Don't let them take the credit for ruining your reputation; let them ruin their own.
10. Never say "no" because they're PKs, if you would say "yes" if they weren't.
11. Teach children how to handle the responsibility of a role model.
12. Accept children's activities as important as your own.
13. Allow Dad to take some child-rearing responsibilities.
14. Make sure the kids experience the benefits of PKs.
15. Don't allow the children to misuse their privilege.
16. Don't talk about confidential or unpleasant church matters in front of the children.

Interview other pastors and/or pastors' wives and record any other child-rearing suggestions for the PK:

17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____
21. _____
22. _____
23. _____
24. _____

Interview other mothers about how to win back the prodigal and record their suggestions here (read the article in Appendix B):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Read one book that you feel will make you a better PW. List the book you read here, and give the bibliographical information for the book if it is not listed on the resource page:

List the ideas you gained from reading this book:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Resources for Pastors' Wives and Their Families

Bailey, Robert W. and Mary Frances Bailey. *Coping With Stress in the Minister's Home* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1979).

Bess, Mary E. *Tips for Ministers and Mates* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987).

Damp, Margaret. *Finding Fulfillment in the Manse* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1978).

Hart, Archibald D. *Coping with Depression in the Ministry and Other Helping Professions* (Waco, TX: Word Books Publisher, 1984).

White, Ruthe. *What Every Pastor's Wife Should Know* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1987).

Appendix A

(This article originally appeared in the November 1987 issue of *Ministry*.)

Ten Tips for Raising PKs

The Do's and Don'ts of Raising Preachers' Kids—Right From Their Own Mouths

By Kay Kuzma, Ed.D.

There is definitely an art to raising kids in the parsonage—just ask any pastor who is trying to do it! Raising children is hard enough under optimum conditions, but put your family in a fishbowl and surround them with the diverse and unrealistic expectations of an entire congregation, and you're in for some special challenges!

Parenting in the parsonage will never be easy, but it can be successful. I've talked to hundreds of pastors and their children, and here is their advice.

1. *Let kids be themselves.* Everyone seems to expect PKs to be perfect, talented, intelligent, and friendly. But preachers' kids are, first of all, kids! They go through the same stages that teachers' kids go through and mechanics' kids, manufacturers' kids, and. . . . Just being born to pastors doesn't mean that a halo of rational maturity automatically is bestowed as a birthright.

Larry's folks had just moved to a new parish, and because Larry was an only child, the church members were eager to make him feel welcome. "Larry," the youth activities leader asked, "how about leading out in the song service next week?"

Larry groaned. He couldn't carry a tune.

"Larry, we need someone to tell a story at children's church. Can we count on you? Or would you rather have the prayer?" someone else asked.

Larry's reaction to each of these requests was, "No thanks—that's not for me." Getting up in front of others just wasn't his thing.

What Larry wanted most of all was simply to melt into the background. He wanted to be just like all the other kids. He would find his place of service eventually, but he hated it when everyone assumed he would be musical, a storyteller, or a prayer person just because his dad was.

And he resented his "pushy" parents even more—even though they didn't mean to be pushy at all. They just wanted to encourage Larry to participate in as many activities as possible. "Larry, why don't you say yes? What will the people think if you don't cooperate? It would do you good to get up front once in a while. How will you ever know if you can lead music or tell stories if you never even try?" Their pleas went on and on. Mom and Dad were just trying to be helpful, but it made Larry feel as if he would be accepted only if he did what they wanted him to do, and that made him angry and resistant—and it nearly ruined relationships within the family.

2. *Praise them.* Let them know they are special. Every child has special needs, skills, talents, and abilities. Let your kids know that you appreciate them.

A pastor's wife, who was a preacher's kid herself, once said: "My dad believed that I'd be conceited if he praised me. He always told me that pride was one of the things the Bible mentions that God hates, and it was too easy for me to get attention because I was the preacher's kid, so he didn't want to contribute to a feeling of pride by praising me. I do not remember my dad ever complimenting me for anything I did. That's probably why I don't have a very good feeling about myself today. Now that I have children, I don't want to make the same mistake, so I make sure that I notice the special things they do and let them know that I approve. Preachers' kids need words of appreciation just like other kids—and maybe even a few more because they are so often the brunt of criticism."

3. *Give them space.* Living in the parsonage can be like living in a goldfish bowl unless you make a real effort to preserve your family's privacy. One pastor said that the wisest move he ever had made was when he traded homes with the church maintenance man. The maintenance man moved into the parsonage next to the church so he could keep the building and grounds in order, while the pastor and his family moved to the country so they could have a life of their own.

Shelly, the daughter of a pastor, said that every time she left the house on a date, she felt the eyes of the neighborhood following her. It wasn't that she was embarrassed to be seen with a fellow or that she would be intimidated by whatever stories might be circulated about the hours she kept, but she resented the fact that she couldn't have the privacy other kids did. The saving factor for her was that her father believed in weekly vacations. Once every week the family took a day off, left the parsonage, and went shopping, picnicking, boating, or whatever else the kids wanted to do. Shelly felt the trade-off was worth it—six days in the goldfish bowl for one day of her own.

If you feel you're living in a goldfish bowl, don't add to the problem by telling a story in a sermon that might embarrass someone in your family. Be sure to ask permission before telling anything about the family. And don't be defensive about your children's behavior. When someone criticizes, just smile, and with a twinkle in your eye say, "He's a special kid. What a challenge—and what a delight! Aren't you glad that God is not finished with any of us yet?" The idea is to let the criticizing person know that you are tuned in to your kid and won't stoop to demeaning talk about a family member. We all have faults!

4. *Take time to talk to your kids.* Pastors and their wives usually spend a great deal of time counseling others. Since so much of their day is spent talking, they sometimes cherish their time at home as a time of solitude—a time for reflection and study. Jake says that he remembers running up to his father's office in the attic, bubbling over with some neat piece of information, only to be scolded for interrupting. Yet seconds later his dad answered the phone and could be heard saying to someone else, "Oh no, you're not interrupting anything; I was just sitting here reading." Jake said that if there was one thing he wished he could change in his father, it was that his dad would have time for him in the same way he had time for others. Contrast this dad with Abraham Lincoln, who, I understand, gave his son, Tad, unlimited access to himself during his working hours. He was first of all a father, and second the president.

It's easy for children to feel that they aren't very important to dad if he spends more time with others than with them. And since pastors are known for being gone long hours, it becomes all the more important for them to plan daily time with their kids so they can

talk without interruption. One evangelist I know planned bedtimes for his children at half-hour intervals so he could spend 30 minutes with each one individually on nights when he was home.

5. *Make your home fit your kids and not the kids fit the parsonage.* Too many pastors feel that their home has to be a showcase for visitors, and the kids get crucified anytime they leave a mess in the living room, put fingerprints on the sliding glass door, or run through the house whooping and hollering. It's no fun to grow up in a museum. Homes are to be lived in.

Chris was a collector. He loved rocks and shells, stamps and baseball cards. But his folks never complained about his cluttered shelves—his room was his own. If he chose to open it to friends, that was his decision, but his mom never embarrassed him by parading parishioners past his highly valued, yet often disheveled, treasures. He respected his mom and dad for respecting him.

6. *Lengthen the apron strings—allow your kids to grow toward independence on their timetable, not yours.* One of the most difficult aspects of parenting preachers' kids is to allow them to make their own decisions even though their immature choices might embarrass the pastor. In some homes “father knows best” is more than just an old TV series. It's not wrong for father to know best, but it is wrong for fathers to make all the decisions. “Dad was so afraid I'd make a bad decision and tarnish the family name that I never had a chance to make any choices until I went away to college,” said one PK. “Because my father never trusted me to make decisions, I didn't trust myself, so I tended to lean on others to make decisions for me, and I got into some pretty tough jams because of it. I'm trying to be more decisive, but I wish I had had an opportunity to practice making decisions during my growing years. Then I could have learned by my mistakes while my folks were still around to rescue me, and decision-making wouldn't have been as frightening as it is now.”

Training for independence should start early. Good decision-making is a developed skill. It takes practice. Too often Christian parents, particularly parents in church leadership, erroneously feel that they must be restrictive to be conservative. However, Dr. Roger Dudley, a professor of Christian education at Andrews University, has found in his research that one of the major reasons teenagers give for rejecting religion is that adults are too restrictive. Rather than being allowed to grow toward independence, teens feel they have to rebel to be able to make their own decisions, and rebelling against adult authority too often means rebelling against what their parents stand for—the church and a relationship with God.

Teach them to be polite though not perfect. Learning how to treat people with respect is one of the most important lessons children can learn. It is especially important for preachers' kids because they are constantly in the presence of others. You can expect children to make innocent mistakes like laughing at a bald head or telling a fat lady she should be on a diet. They should not be punished for such mistakes. Instead they should be encouraged to treat others as Christ would. Teach your children how to greet strangers, how to shake hands with a firm grip, how to respond to a compliment with a smile and a genuine thank-you, how to give up their chair for an older person, and how to politely ask for something with a “May I, please?” Your children may not be perfect, but if they are polite, it will hide a multitude of sins!

7. *Never discipline in public.* Cory was seated beside her mother—the pastor’s wife—in the front pew of church. Her father was halfway into his sermon when Cory’s wiggling and whispering got the best of him. He stopped right in the middle of his sermon, looked at Cory with a stern face, and said, “Cory, I’ve had enough. Either you be quiet and sit still or I’m going to have to take you out and spank you myself.” Cory slid down into her seat and wished she, like Peter Pan, could disappear. She told me that something happened to her that day. Her father had been her idol—her hero—and for him to say that to her in front of the entire congregation was worse than sudden death. Thirty years later she still didn’t think she had fully recovered from the humiliation she suffered that day.

The moral: Never discipline your children in front of an audience. Even an audience of one can cause overwhelming pain. If your children misbehave—and you know they will—wait to discipline them when you are alone. Maybe you’ll have to excuse yourself from a committee meeting, maybe you’ll have to cut your sermon short, maybe you’ll have to ask someone to substitute for you while you talk to your child privately. But whatever you do, don’t get impatient and discipline in public.

8. *Don’t let them take the credit for ruining your reputation; let them ruin their own.* Most parents would give anything if they could make sure their children would choose to be saved. But you can’t make that choice. Every child must develop his or her own value system and ultimately make his or her own decisions. You should not feel guilty about your children’s choices. If you do, you are not being fair to them. Don’t blame yourself for how your children behave. The longer you continue to blame yourself, the less responsibility they will feel for their behavior. It’s too easy for kids to cop out and say, “If you’d only spent more time with me I wouldn’t be a druggie. If you wouldn’t have been so strict I wouldn’t have had to cheat and lie. If you hadn’t spanked me so much, I wouldn’t be such an angry person.” Don’t accept those excuses. Chances are that you were the best parent you knew how to be. Sure, you made mistakes; all parents do. But if you are sorry for those errors and ask forgiveness, then it’s up to your children either to forgive you and choose not to allow those mistakes to ruin their lives, or to choose to remain bitter and continue to suffer. The sooner you can place upon your children the responsibility for their own behavior, the sooner they will learn to make mature decisions.
9. *Never say no because they’re preacher’s kids if you would say yes if they weren’t.* Kids are kids. They want to be treated fairly. Too many PKs complain that their folks are always saying, “No, we can’t let you do that because your father’s a pastor.” Millie and her brother begged their folks for a pool table. They had played on one at a relative’s house and really enjoyed the game. They had plenty of room in the basement, but their dad said no. He felt that some of the church members might criticize. The kids resented his decision.

The older children become, the more they can understand the importance of example and choose on their own to be like the apostle Paul, who chose not to do things that might lead others astray. But during those growing-up years, having a different set of standards imposed on them just because they happen to be living in the parsonage doesn’t seem fair to them. If you’re not careful, kids will resent your negative attitude. One pastor said he and his wife carefully considered questionable behavior and activities, and if they would have said yes to the kids if they had been in a different profession, they said, “Yes, but,” to their children. “Yes, you can go if you choose to, but some people may not agree that this is an acceptable activity.” Then they would ask

their kids whether they thought it was worth taking the chance. Many times the children themselves chose a more suitable alternative, but if not, the children weren't made to feel guilty.

It's not easy to live with God's kids in a parsonage. But you can be a successful pastor and a successful parent at the same time. You may not be perfect, but God says to love one another, to not provoke your children to wrath, and to do good when it's in your power to do so (John 15:12; Ephesians 6:4; and Proverbs 3:27). May God bless you as you minister to those special children living with you in the parsonage.

Appendix B

(This article first appeared in *Family Life Today*.)

Parenting Your Prodigal

By Kay Kuzma, Ed.D.

How do you parent a prodigal? Do you kick him out or welcome him home? The answer isn't clear-cut. What the child needs (more than ever before) is unconditional love *and* limits. Kids must feel accepted, but if they choose to hurt others with their rebellion, then there must be a consequence! In love, you cannot allow your child to mistreat anyone—including yourself!

Let's Talk About Limits

Rhonda was a prodigal living at home. Cultism, heavy metal music, alcohol, and pot were a common part of her lifestyle, and it clashed head-on with the values of the rest of the family.

With three very impressionable younger children, Mom felt she must take a stand for their sakes. As much as she loved Rhonda, Rhonda could not be allowed to flaunt her deviant lifestyle in her home and destroy one or all of her vulnerable siblings. So, with "tough love," Mom laid down the law: "I don't care what you do alone in your room as long as it doesn't interfere with the family. But if you are to live here at home, this is what I expect:

- "1. No signs of drinking or smoking in any part of this house; for example, no beer cans in the fridge or ashtrays by the TV. And because none of us care for the smell of smoke, you'll have to watch that, too.
- "2. You can listen to whatever music you want in the privacy of your own room, as long as it can't be heard outside your room.
- "3. You may not entertain friends in your room with alcohol, smoking, or cultish activities. Why? It's my home, I can be held responsible for what happens here, and these activities are definitely not healthful!

"Now, as long as you are willing to abide by the established family policy, you are welcome to stay. If not, you must leave.

"I pray that will never happen, but if it does, I will help you find an apartment and pay first and last month rent to help you get established. After that you'll be on your own to continue paying the rent. If things get tough, I want you to know that I will not provide periodic handouts to help support the lifestyle you have chosen.

"If you want to come back home, you'll always be welcome, but the same rules will apply. If you break them the second time, it will be entirely up to you to establish yourself elsewhere. I'll pay the rent only once to help you get established independently.

"I believe I am doing this for your own good. I love you and always will, but I cannot allow you to destroy the lives of those around you. You must realize there are consequences to a continued life of defying authority. If you choose to go in that direction, it would be unfair of me not to allow you to learn by natural consequences.

"If worse comes to worse, you probably will not believe I love you. But I do and no matter what you do, I always will. I will be praying that someday in the future you will understand.

"And, honey, you may be my prodigal right now, but just like the story Jesus told about the prodigal son, I believe you, too, will come home. I'm waiting for that happy time when you'll be 'home' not just in body, but also in spirit!"

Unconditional Love

Sharon and her husband hadn't heard from their son in months. David had run away, telling them only that he was going to Los Angeles. They asked him to write. He didn't, but that didn't keep his mom from hoping and searching. Finally, through an old friend, Sharon was able to get an address of someone who might know his whereabouts. She wrote expressing love and a longing to see him. Would it be possible for him to meet them at the Los Angeles airport as they passed through with a tour group?

Finally the day came. The entire tour group was assembled in the boarding area.

Just minutes before they began boarding, she saw a shabby looking couple break through the crowd.

Sharon's immediate thought was, "How could anyone go out in public looking like that . . . and the nerve of them, pushing their way through the middle of our tour group." She was just about to turn away, repulsed by the sight, when she recognized her son.

Impulsive anger welled up in her heart. But she squelched the feeling and ran to him with arms outstretched. With genuine tears of happiness she cried, "Oh, David. You came. You came!"

And then, without any hesitation or show of embarrassment, she turned to the crowd that was watching and announced, "I would like you to meet our son, David."

Think about it. Our prodigal children haven't treated us very differently than we have treated our heavenly Father. Aren't you thankful our Father is someday going to greet all His prodigal sons and daughters with open arms? Shouldn't we do the same for ours?