

The Journal



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The Road of Life

At first, I saw God as my observer, my judge, keeping track of the things I did wrong, so as to know whether I merited heaven or hell when I died. He was out there sort of like a president. I recognized His picture when I saw it, but I really didn't know Him. But later on when I met Christ, it seemed as though life were rather like a bike ride, but it was a tandem bike, and I noticed that Christ was in the back helping me pedal. I don't know just when it was that He suggested we change places, but life has not been the same since.

When I had control, I knew the way. It was the shortest distance between lead, He knew delightful long rocky places at breakneck speeds.



It was rather boring, but predictable. two points. But when He took the cuts, up mountains and through It was all I could do to hang on!

Even though it looked like madness, anxious and asked, "Where are you taking me?" He laughed and didn't answer, and I started to learn to trust. I forgot my boring life and entered into the adventure, and when I'd say, "I'm scared," He'd lean back and touch my hand. I gained love, peace, acceptance, and joy—gifts to take on my journey, my Lord's and mine. And we were off again.

He said, "Pedal!" I worried and was you taking me?" He laughed and didn't answer, and I started to learn to trust. I forgot my boring life and entered into the adventure, and when I'd say, "I'm scared," He'd lean back and touch my hand. I gained love, peace, acceptance, and joy—gifts to take on my journey, my Lord's and mine. And we were off again.

He said, "Give the gifts away. They're extra baggage, too much weight." So I did, to the people we met, and I found that in giving I received, and still our burden was light.

I did not trust Him, at first, in control of my life. I thought He'd wreck it; but He knows bike secrets, knows how to make it bend to take sharp corners, knows how to jump to clear high rocks, knows how to fly to shorten scary passages. And I am learning to shut up and pedal in the strangest places, and I'm beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face with the delightful constant companion, Jesus Christ.

And when I'm sure I just can't do it anymore, He just smiles and says, "Pedal."

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Editor's Musings

Dear Friends,

A very wise pastor's wife penned the following quotation, and in this issue I want to share her admonition with you. It is my prayer that it will strengthen and bless you as it has me.

"Do not become overwhelmed with the great amount of work you must do in your lifetime, for you are not required to do it all at once. Let every power of your being go to each day's work, improve each precious opportunity, appreciate the helps that God gives you and make advancement up the ladder of progress step by step. Remember that you are to live but one day at a time, that God has given you one day, and heavenly records will show how you have valued its privileges and opportunities. May you so improve every day given you of God, that at last you may hear the Master say, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.'"¹

God bless you every one.

Love,



¹ Ellen White, *Maranatha*, chapter 76 "Climbing Peter's Ladder."

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Praises in the Night

Barbara Huff

Many years ago I learned a lesson that has stuck with me for life. As I stood mutely next to my mother during the opening song of church, she poked me with her elbow and commanded in a stage whisper, "Sing!"

"I don't feel like singing," I muttered.

She had no sympathy. "Then that's exactly when you need to sing!"

So I sang. And I've been singing the clouds away, as the old song says, ever since. Of course, I forget sometimes and wallow in my despair before I remember to sing.

For years I've made it a practice to never turn on the radio or TV before

I've had my personal devotions. Driving to work in the morning, as much as I love to hear the news, I choose to sing songs of worship to my Lord. The news can wait; I must start my day with praise.

Going through some tough times recently, I found myself waking up frequently night after night. Then it dawned on me that I wasn't thinking about my problem when I awoke. Instead, the melody and first four words of a song were going through my mind. (I only knew the first four words.) Strangely, it wasn't one of the songs that I regularly sang, nor was it one I knew from long ago. It was a traditional congregational hymn that was often sung in church.

In addition, even in the daytime when my mind would wander to the current stressor, that song was always in the background. I took out my hymnal, thinking that I really ought to learn the words to at least one stanza. My song of comfort begins:

"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,
the king of creation.

O my soul, praise Him,
For He is thy health and salvation!"
WOW!


Recently I told a friend that I was going through the worse trial that I'd ever experienced. Later I asked myself, is this really true? Reflecting some more, I had to think hard to

bring up old memories of trying times. Yes, there was the time my husband was sick and the time my daughter was sick. There were also the times the children had had difficult school experiences. These experiences were pretty rough, but I had a hard time remembering them now. When I finally did recall them it was without pain—that had been blotted out!

Time will heal my present hurt, and it will heal a lot faster as I sing praises to the Lord. Until now the situation was dragging me down. My health was beginning to suffer. Then I finally realized that "He is my health and salvation!"

Each phrase of "Praise to the Lord" is rich with praise and assurance. It's amazing that this hymn, penned by Joachim Neander in 1680, is encouraging people more than 300 years later. But then, maybe it isn't so amazing. Joachim Neander based his hymn on verses in Psalms 103 and 150 that David wrote centuries before the birth of Christ. Some things never change.

"Ponder anew what the Almighty can do, if with His love He befriend thee."

Thank you, Holy Spirit, for reminding me to turn my troubled heart to praise—especially in the middle of the night. 

Barbara Huff is enjoying a busy retirement in Florida where she lives near two of her three grandchildren. She loves writing and photography.

She also enjoys creating albums from her own photographs. Bird watching and reading are high on her list of leisure time activities. Living in Florida makes her hobby of shell collecting a natural.



Relentless Exposure

A New Look at an Old Biblical Story

Glenise Hardy

As I sat pondering my situation, my heart was heavy. Though I had expected things would be difficult, I had not expected things to be like this. A multitude of emotions flooded my mind. I was so confused. How could Jo do this to me? I mean, calling off our marriage was out of the question! At least that's the way I saw it. But obviously Jo had a different opinion.

As I sat there, thinking of life's twists and turns, I could not help but think of that night not so long ago. The evening had been perfect. Twilight seemed to hang on longer than usual, and Jo and I shared so much together. We talked of our dreams and hopes for the years to come. We talked of the children we

would one day have. We both wanted boys and girls, but we agreed we wanted a son first, a son to carry on the family name. We prayed together that night. We thanked God for our relationship and the future we shared. Jo left long after dark.

Now it was three months later, and our secret would soon be obvious. I was pregnant. Yes, I'd given myself to Jo even though I was rather overwhelmed at the idea. But it was a wonderful experience. It seemed a bit out of this world, really. I only felt saddened that I could not share my joy with my friends. I knew they would not understand.

But the unthinkable happened. I was pregnant with Jo's child. Jo didn't get mad or angry when I gave him the news. He was shocked though. In his agitation, he made it clear our marriage was off. Now I was the one to be shocked. What about all our dreams and hopes? Jo said it would be better for me if we did not marry. Better for me? My heart was breaking, and my life was in turmoil.

Teenage pregnancies were dealt with harshly in my family. Who could I turn to? I was scared. I thought of a cousin I had little contact with. She was older than me and she had moved away ages ago. Still, maybe I could find her. My

heart started thumping wildly in my chest as I thought of opening an unfamiliar door. I hurriedly called her before my courage ran out.

My dear cousin Beth welcomed me with open arms. Her enthusiasm and excitement engulfed me. In Beth I found a kindred spirit.

When I went to live with Beth, she was six months' pregnant. We shared so much. Dates were compared, diets discussed, priorities established. The nurture and support I needed most were readily available. Beth's patience exceeded all expectations.

Putting aside her own problem of a non-converted husband, Beth motivated me spiritually. She encouraged me to develop a deeper relationship with God. She suggested I keep the relationship between myself and Jo open and friendly.

As our tummies grew, so did our friendship. Beth's kind spirit and wise counsel helped Jo and me draw close together once again. We planned our marriage, and soon it was time to move from Beth's home.

Beth and her husband Zak had a little boy. They named him John. And wonder of wonders, my baby arrived right on time. A united Jo and I named him Jesus after the Son who took me beyond my greatest fears and wildest dreams. Our God is an awesome God!



Glenise lives in Melbourne, Australia. She enjoys sewing clothes for babies and encouraging teenagers in their journey of life.

Praying for Your Kids

Susan Alexander
Yates

Susan Alexander Yates speaks around the country on marriage and family and is often heard on the radio. She has authored several books including Then I Had Teenagers: Encouragement for Parents of Teens and Preteens, Then I Had Kids: Encouragement for Parents of Young Children, Character Matters: Raising Kids with Values that Last (written with her husband John) and How to Like the Ones You Love: Building Family Friendships for Life. For more information on her ministry see www.yatesbooks.com. This article first appeared in Today's Christian Woman May/June 2002 issue.

Susan and her husband John have been married for almost 33 years and are the proud parents of 5 children and 2 grandchildren. They are especially grateful for the five great kids their children have married.



My phone rang yesterday. It was our 22-year-old daughter, Susy, calling from California.

"Mom, what are you doing today? How can I be praying for you this week?" Susy asked.

"Pray for me to become a woman of gratitude. Too often I take God for granted. How about you?" I continued. "How can I pray for you?"

"Please pray for my job. My boss is leaving, so that impacts my duties. Oh, and thanks for praying for my daily devotions. I've had consistent quiet times this week."

Could it be that the most important thing we do as parents is pray for our kids? Unfortunately, sometimes we're so busy trying to make it through the day that it's hard to make the time. Here are five suggestions to help you activate your prayer life for your children.

1. Get Organized

I use a notebook that's divided into seven sections, one for each day of the week. Under each section I list my children, my husband, and myself. I have certain things I pray for concerning each person on that particular weekday. For example, on Mondays I pray for my son Chris's study habits, his time alone with God, his friendships with three guy

friends, and his ability to discern God's direction about his next step schoolwise. On Tuesdays, I pray for different things for Chris. This way I don't feel as though I have to cover all my children's needs on any one day. As things come up, I simply add them to a day of the week.

My husband, John, has a similar notebook. He loves to glue photos of each person he's praying for next to their section. (I'm not that organized!)

2. Ask What Your Child Needs

It's all too easy to respond to your life randomly rather than intentionally. But the good thing about summer approaching is that it offers you a little more time with your kids, especially if they're young. So look at them with fresh eyes and ask yourself, What are my children's needs for this summer? Perhaps your elementary school-aged daughter is struggling to find friends or your teen is questioning his faith. Ask God in the weeks ahead to reveal specific things you should be praying about for each of your children.

Then, mark a date on your calendar now for some time in August to discuss with your husband your family's needs and goals for the coming year. If you're a single parent, do this with another mom or couple,

and agree to pray for each other's children over the next several months.

3. Use Prayers from Scripture

When I don't know how to pray specifically for one of my children, I head directly to God's Word, which contains wonderful prayers. For example, Ephesians 1:17-19 is a beautiful prayer. So is Philippians 1:9-11. Insert your child's name into the prayer wherever it says "you." My mom inserts her grandchildren's names into the Lord's Prayer to pray for them. Stormie Omartian's book, *The Power of a Praying Parent* (Harvest House) or author Jodie Berndt's *Praying the Scripture for Your Children* (Zondervan) are excellent resources, particularly for mothers of young children.

4. Expect God to Answer

God always answers prayer—but He doesn't always answer it in the way we expect or according to our time frame. I've found His answers generally fall into one of three responses: "Yes," "No," or "Wait." If the answer is "wait," you may find yourself wondering if God hears or really cares. But God hears your prayers—and is at work in your child's life! For instance, if you have a rebellious child, you may not see God's answers for years. But remember, He loves your child and wants what's best for her. So during a waiting period, ask God what He wants to teach you. It may be a lesson about something unrelated to the issue at hand.


5. Remember Who's in Control

The task of praying for our kids can often overwhelm us. But don't forget, your children are God's children first. He knows them better than you do and loves them more than you do. He also knows the plans He has prepared for them (Jeremiah

29:11). God is your partner in parenting; it's not all up to you.

You can go to God in confidence not because of who you are (sometimes I feel like the worst mom in town!). Go to Him because of who He is, King of kings, the one for whom nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37), the one who is praying for our kids (Hebrews 7:25). When you feel overwhelmed, say out loud God's character traits: He's faithful; He's

merciful; He's slow to anger; He's mighty, an ever-present help, etc. Remembering these aspects of God will help your faith to grow.

Well-known author Oswald Chambers has said, "We look upon prayer as a means of getting things for ourselves; the Bible's idea of prayer is that we may get to know God Himself." That's exactly what happens when you pray for your kids. 

Ten Rules For a Blessed Day

Today I will not strike back—if someone is rude, if someone is impatient, if someone is unkind, I will not respond in a like manner.

Today I will ask God to bless my "enemy"—if I come across someone who treats me harshly or unfairly, I will quietly ask God to bless that individual. I understand "enemy" could be a family member, neighbor, co-worker, or stranger.

Today I will be careful about what I say—I will carefully choose and guard my words, being certain that I do not spread gossip.

Today I will go the extra mile—I will find ways to help share the burden of another person.

Today I will forgive—I will forgive any hurts or injuries that come my way.

Today I will do something kind for someone, (but I will do it in secret)—I will reach out anonymously and bless the life of another.

Today I will treat others the way I wish to be treated—I will practice the golden rule, "Do unto others as I would have them do unto me," with *everyone* I encounter.

Today I will raise the spirits of someone who is discouraged—my smile, my words, my expression of support, can make the difference to someone who is wrestling with life.

Today I will nurture my body . . . I will eat less—I will eat only healthy foods. I will thank God for my body.

Today I will grow spiritually—I will spend a little more time in prayer today. I will begin reading something spiritual or inspirational; I will find a quiet place (at some point during this day) and listen to God's voice.

Living Among the Unbelievers



Chayedza Bundo

Chase away the goats! Chase away the goats!" I heard that cry every afternoon when my daughter came home from school. We lived beside neighbors who kept goats in their yards even though it was prohibited by the Council. Though our house was surrounded by gates, the people who visited our neighbors would often leave the gates open as they walked through our yard.

Our neighbors were quite different. Actually, they were prostitutes. The traffic through our neighborhood was brisk and, of course, whenever the gates were left open, the goats would rush into our yard and eat whatever they could find.

We were in a dilemma. We were facing economic hardships, and we needed every vegetable we were growing. The goats were demolishing our food supply! We wanted to be good witnesses to our neighbors, so instead of complaining over and over about the goats, we would

simply chase them away each day.

The situation continued, and we prayed for guidance from the Lord on how we should handle the problem. I recalled some of Jesus' words when He said, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father, which is in heaven." Our family was determined to let our light shine even though we faced the "goat" problem every day.


We began to look at the situation as a test of our faith. Perhaps our neighbors were waiting to see the light shining from us. Perhaps they were waiting to see how we "Christians" would react to a stressful situation. We were determined to keep quiet. We knew we would reap from the garden whatever the Lord wanted us to have.

I have heard stories of people who were in similar situations. In our country, many Christians are fighting with non-Christians about land. Dear Shepherdesses, we are not commissioned to fight for lands, argue with neighbors, or exchange vulgar words with others. We are on this earth to help spread the Gospel.

We are to lead by example. Remember what Jesus had to endure while He was on this planet. He was rebuked, mocked, and lied about, yet He remained silent.

We live among non-believers. My family and I have no close friends. Many people in the village ignore us because of our beliefs. When my husband is gone, my children and I are particularly lonely. We find solace in the fact that we are here for the Gospel's sake.

I have needed a housemaid for some time. With three young children and a husband who spends a great deal of time ministering to others, a housemaid would help me greatly. I could leave my children with her and occasionally go somewhere without them. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find someone who is willing to stay with me. The few who have been hired quit because they felt we spent too much time praying and studying the Bible.

We have been in this place since 1994. Sometimes the challenges seem overwhelming, and I plead for strength to overcome the atmosphere around us. When I feel despair, the Lord comforts me, and I know that He is watching over my family. Our trials strengthen us as we go about sharing the love of Jesus with our village brethren. 

Chayedza has been working with her husband in the ministry for thirteen years. They have three children. When she wrote this article, Patience was eight; Daniel six; and Hope two. Chayedza's hobbies include cooking vegetarian dishes, gardening, and sewing.

Your Vocation Can Set the World on Fire!

Clotilde Georges

Clotilde Georges has been a pastor's wife for many years and serves as a Shepherdess Coordinator in France.



As humans we have a natural desire to identify and express our life's plans. Some call it a mission, call, or vision. Another term is vocation. The Bible gives meaning to this word.

All human beings have a vocation. It is not something we choose. It comes from deep within ourselves. It is the potential a person owns, just as the acorn owns the potential to be an oak tree.

A vocation is what we are called to accomplish. It is the Holy Spirit in us making the acorn explode to give birth. Vocations exist in many fields, but all who are touched by the Holy Spirit have a vocation symbolized by the fire that lights in us when the Holy Spirit touches our hearts.

Vocation symbolized by the flame

Vocation is a source of light. When we live our vocation, we become a source of light. Throughout the ages, light has been a synonym for truth, wisdom, and knowledge. When we follow our vocations, we are living our inner truths and not trying to live someone else's truth. Matthew 5:15 tells us to let our lights shine, not hide them under bushels.

Many times light is symbolized by a flame. The flame symbolizes warmth. Since we are owners of this flame, we should be warm and

passionate people. We should create an atmosphere of comfort, acceptance, and well-being in those around us.

Bernard Shaw used to say, "When I die, I want to be totally consumed. . . . Life for me isn't a small candle; it's a splendid torch that I'll have handled for a while, and I want it to burn with as much brightness as possible before passing it on to future generations."

Jesus Christ is our great example. His mission was to save lost humanity. His life was consumed with His vocation.

There are many examples of those who followed their vocations. Through their visions, Moses, Gandhi, Marie Curie, Ellen White, and Martin Luther King were all power-filled. What about you? Do you have a vocation? Is it your vocation to be a mother, teacher, elder, deaconess, minister? You can be the light of your family, friends, church, and community.

Everyone, both male and female, has a vocation. I believe men and women differ in their response to their vocations. Man, by nature, deals with relationships in an intellectual, objective way. He is more rational, drawn by economy, sciences, industry, technical topics, computers, etc. He takes pleasure in abstract matters. Being the only ruler

for centuries, he has built an impersonal civilization, an anonymous and functional world, a world of things and ideas.

The woman has “heart intuition.” Jesus, throughout His ministry, regarded women as complete beings. He acknowledged women as recognized spokespersons, trustworthy to receive His confidences. He spoke to women as He spoke to men. He gave them respect. He had high expectations for them. The promises He made were for both genders.

It is interesting to see how the genders responded to Jesus. When the disciples were with Jesus, they often questioned Him. They wanted to know who was going to be the first among them. During their last discussion when they were having the Last Supper, they were arguing for power. Even though they were with Jesus, they didn’t understand Him. They understood Jesus in the “male” way—objectively.

Now consider Mary. When Jesus was at Simon’s house, Mary carried an alabaster vase containing pure perfume of great value. She broke the vase and spread the perfume on Jesus’ feet. Then she kissed them. She was grateful for the forgiveness she had received from Jesus. Through her intuition, she understood Jesus very well. She was imbued with His words, and she caught the mystery of Jesus no language can define.

Both men and women receive the spiritual flame, but the way they live and express it are very different. Unfortunately, we live in a society where women are often excluded from certain functions. They have no status, no religious role, and they are relegated to the role of the follower.

This should change. Men and women were created to complement one another. Both have vocations that glorify God. Thirty years of ministry has taught me that when

men and women are given the chance to collaborate on a deeper level and form a spiritual unity with

Christ, great things can happen. Light can shine and God’s glory can be spread throughout this world. ☺

1 Corinthians 13 for Moms

I can read bedtime stories till the cow jumps over the moon and sing “Ten Little Monkeys” until I want to call the doctor, but if I don’t have love, I’m as annoying as a ringing phone.

I can chase a naked toddler through the house while cooking dinner and listening to the voice mail, I can fix the best cookies and Kool-Aid in the neighborhood, and I can tell a sick child’s temperature with one touch of my finger, but if I don’t have love, I am nothing.

Love is patient, while watching and praying by the front window when it’s 30 minutes past curfew. Love is kind when my teen says, “I hate you!”

It does not envy the neighbor’s swimming pool or new mini-van but trusts the Lord to provide for every need.

Love does not brag when other parents share their disappointments and insecurities, and love rejoices when other families succeed.

It doesn’t boast, even when I’ve multi-tasked all day long and my husband can’t do more than one thing at a time.

Love is not rude when my spouse innocently asks, “What have you done today?”

It does not immediately seek after glory when we see talent in our children, but encourages them to get training and make wise choices.

It is not easily angered, even when my 15-year-old acts like the world revolves around her.

It does not delight in evil (is not self-righteous) when I remind my 17-year-old that he’s going 83 in a 55-mph zone, but rejoices in the truth.

Love does not give up hope. It always protects our children’s self-esteem and spirit, even while doing discipline.

It always trusts God to protect our children when we cannot.

It always perseveres, through blue nail polish, burps, and other bodily functions, rolled eyes and crossed arms, messy rooms, and sleepovers.

Love never fails. But where there are memories of thousands of diaper changes and painful labor(s) they will fade away.

Where there is talking back, it will (eventually) cease. (Please, Lord?)

Where there is a teenager who thinks she knows everything, there will one day be an adult who knows you did your best.

For we know we fail our children, and we pray they don’t end up in therapy, but when we receive eternal life, our imperfect parenting will disappear. (Thank you, God!)

When we were children, we needed a parent to love and protect us. Now that we’re parents ourselves, we have a heavenly Father who adores us, shelters us, and holds us when we need to cry.

And now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Christians in Barbie Land

Jan Johnson

Jan Johnson is a speaker and author of *When Food Is Your Best Friend* and *When the Soul Listens*. She lives in Simi Valley, California.



Are you working out every day?" asked Jennifer, a fellow aerobics enthusiast.

"No," I told her, "I work out three times a week, and I feel great."

"But you won't lose weight that way," she protested.

I winced because I knew my reply sounded so peculiar: "I'm not trying to look like a babe. I just want to be healthy and of average weight."

Jennifer assumed that I was like many American men and women, 65 million of whom are dieting on an average day. In our culture, which says all men should resemble work-out buffs and all women should be pencil-thin, overexercising and daily weigh-ins are common. The apostle Paul might paraphrase Philippians 3:19 for our culture by writing, "Their destiny is destruction, their god is their flat stomachs, and their glory is in their shame."

Fitness, one of the principal paths to good health, has now become intertwined deeply and dangerously with self-worth. Supposedly the more fit you look, the more likely you are to be hired for a job, to find a spouse, to be one of the admired and appreciated. Fitness has become especially entwined with self-worth for American women, 77 percent of whom think they are overweight.

Even among fourth-grade girls, 50- to 80 percent are dieting.

Fitness is not an end in itself, however. It is important only as a tool to help us glorify God in who we are and what we do. As for thinness, our faith says that true attractiveness comes from the growth of the inner self toward God, not from outward show (see 1 Peter 3:3-5). So as the sales of Christian books and videos about fitness soar, we wonder, Are we listening to what God says about our bodies or to a culture that tells us to arrange our schedules and budgets around becoming buff and feeling guilty if we look sideways at a baked potato? Are we striving for good health or is shapeliness now next to godliness?

Here are some paths to consider in finding an attitude toward fitness that flows out of love for God instead of the obsession with our culture's values.

Determine the essence of self-worth. Christians have only one true source of self-worth. I am a worthy person because God loves me: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1).

Believing this truth in our hearts is not an easy task, but following

Jesus means we are in the process of absorbing this truth and letting go of the desire for continual self-affirmation and self-fulfillment. One step in that process may be to surrender the goal of being eligible to model swimwear.

Honor God with your body. In 1 Corinthians 6:16-20, Paul spoke about using our bodies to honor God as we flee sexual immorality. The passage presents the idea that, left to our own devices, we will use our bodies to get what we want. In today's world, that might include the admiring glances of a date, or the power and authority that a well-put-together appearance commands on the job. Part of the Christian adventure is to explore ways to make our bodies a not-so-grievous dwelling place for the Holy Spirit, and to understand that our bodies are "for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (1 Corinthians 6:13).

The effects of chronic dieting diminish one's capacity to serve God. When we're irritable, can't concentrate, or are anxious, depressed, and tired, it's difficult to get out of the front seat of a car, much less walk the extra mile with a hurting person. Fitness then becomes an important issue we take before God, asking Him: "What is Your will about how I become and remain physically fit?"

Because we each have different physical characteristics and patterns, the answers aren't the same for everyone. When Randy, who was a wrestler in high school and now lives in a beach community, sought God's will about weight and appearance, he confessed to his small group at church, "I spend too much time and money on looking good: I work out everyday; I play outdoor sports to get a tan; I search for clothing to match my surfer look. I want to spend more time praying and reading the Bible. Pray for me in this struggle."

As I've asked God over the years to show me His will regarding fitness, He has shown me that I will need to base my goal weight on what the medical charts say rather than on looking eighteen years old. He's shown me that because of time commitments, I need to use an exercise video instead of going to a gym, and that I should not be ashamed if I miss my aerobic routine occasionally.

Accept the body that God gave you as His gift to you. As each of us was knit together in the womb, we inherited a certain body shape, as scientists tell us. Adopting our culture's standards can make us wish God had made different choices. Paul warned us: "Don't let the world squeeze you into its own mold, but let God remold your minds from within" (Romans 12:2, Phillips). As God remolds our thoughts about our bodies according to eternal standards of attractiveness, we can almost laugh at the world's standards. For example, in the days of the Flemish painter Rubens, pear-shaped women were most appealing. Today, wide hips are a curse, unless you live in the Middle East where wide hips increase a woman's marriage prospects.

Even within our own culture, American men and women in the media are much thinner than their counterparts of twenty years ago, says a study by the City University of New York. We can be liberated from the forces of our appearance-crazed culture only as we learn to be content with whatever state our genetic heritage has predisposed us to (see Philippians 4:12).

On days when I look into the floor-length mirror and see that my shape doesn't match that of a magazine model (whose average size is 6!), I strain to recall God's great acceptance of me from a phrase in one of my favorite verses, Psalm

18:19: "[God] rescued me because he delighted in me."

As I put my hands on my hips and lean closer to the mirror, I might whisper to my reflection: "This is me, the one God rescued, the one God delights in."

Aim for self-control, not preoccupation. When we berate ourselves for gaining a pound or constantly weigh ourselves (or tell a spouse or child to do so), this may be fitness obsession, not self-control.


"I always thought Linda was the epitome of self-control," says Beth. "Then we went on a women's retreat together. She complained at every meal about fat grams and threw her food away. She dressed and redressed in the morning, explaining that she used to be overweight and was now very careful with her appearance. Her kind of self-control didn't have anything to do with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and so on."

The fruit of the Spirit, self-control, flows out of Christians who manage what is within their control and surrender what is beyond its limits. We can control whether we eat proper amounts of food and get proper amounts of exercise, but we can't control whether or not the results make us look like Ken or Barbie.

Let God help you. It's not an easy task to live so differently from our culture, and it seems impossible without prayers such as these:

"Help me to link what I feel about myself with Your unfailing love for me.

"Help me to focus my life on my growing union with You, not on the hype of the culture."

By choosing to pray this way, we open ourselves to hear God's answers and let fitness have its appropriate place in our lives. We move along in learning how to surrender our bodies as tools to glorify God. 

Relationship Addiction: Beware of the Danger

Maureen Wilson

A new phrase cropped up the other day, a product of the times in which we live: "relationship addiction."

It was used in reference to children and teens with addictive disorders and emotional problems. But in reflecting on this phrase, it could also describe a perhaps not uncommon situation affecting ministers.

"Relationship addiction"—when a member of the church seems to become so dependent upon the pastor that he/she is unable to make decisions without consulting him.

"Relationship addiction"—when increasingly frequent telephone calls come from the same parishioner who "just needed to talk."

"Relationship addiction"—when the pastor is asked to "please get my mail while I'm away" (or some similar request) . . . "You're the only one I can trust."

Every pastor has experienced relationships where constant demands on his time become oppressive. But relationship addiction becomes a threat when the pastor begins to enjoy the dependence of a member upon him; and a mutual "addiction" is formed. The minister may be unaware that this is happening, or, when he is cautioned by others, he may resent their concern.

Because a minister is expected to be sympathetic, helpful, and willing

to counsel, a dependent relationship could be misjudged. However, if the minister appears to be so emotionally involved with a parishioner that he is unwilling to separate himself despite counsel from others, the problem becomes serious.

The pastor's inability to be objective about the relationship may seriously affect his influence. His family will doubtless be hurt by the criticism his continued actions engender. Eventually, such a scenario could lead to the need to change parishes.

The mid-life pastor is especially vulnerable to "relationship addiction." He may recognize that his career is at a standstill. He may feel unappreciated by his superiors. His mate may be occupied with children or her own career (or both), and have less time to share his dreams and less patience with his frustrations. Or she may be intensely loyal to him and share in his denial that such a relational problem could exist.

One pastor actually discouraged a young woman who relied upon him from making other friends in the church. He disparaged some to whom she could have gone for assistance or advice. Her distrust of anyone but the pastor eventually became apparent. In this extreme case, both were victims of the "relationship addiction."

Maureen Wilson is a pseudonym. This article originally appeared in *Praxis*.

How can you as a pastor determine the status of your relationships?

1. Ask yourself, "If this relationship were severed today, what would I miss most about it?" Be totally honest in this evaluation.

You may find that the relationship provides an enhancement for your ego which you do not receive elsewhere. You may appreciate the other's compliments and confidence. Perhaps he/she has time to listen when it seems no one else cares. You may recognize that the individual's smile, voice, and presence are becoming very important to you. Although no physical intimacy has taken place, there may have been fantasies about the possibility.

2. You may also ask yourself, "What am I receiving from this relationship now?" As a minister, you are most frequently in a giving capacity—yet you also receive. What does the person give to you? Does the role you play in the relationship give you a large degree of power over another's decisions? Is it possible that you enjoy exercising this power?

If a "relationship addiction" could be developing, some (or perhaps all) of the following need to be implemented:

1. Turn to God in prayer. Be completely open with Him. He knows our secret thoughts and the motives we may not admit to anyone else. We need to acknowledge to Him what we have discovered. His love for us will continue, constant and accepting.

2. Confide in another. Unwillingness to discuss the relationship with a trusted, objective person outside our family may indicate we are much too deeply involved.


3. Spend less time with the individual, including telephone time. This may be difficult. He/She may not understand why the pastor is "too busy" when he was previously so available. But this is a vital step

to reconstructing the relationship.

4. Find and recommend an alternate counselor for the parishioner or counselee. Transferring dependence from the pastor to another wise and qualified Christian is important to the welfare of the counselee.

5. Repair home relationships. Look for ways to enhance your relationship with your spouse. Focus on him or her the attention and

willingness to help that you may have given to the counselee. A renewal of warmth and intimacy may well be the result.

While no pastor is immune to "relationship addiction," no pastor needs to remain addicted. With God, objective counsel, personal discipline, and the desire to remain effective, the pastor can realize even greater fulfillment to his call to ministry. 

Some Shared Insight

If you put a buzzard in a 6 x 8 foot pen that is entirely open at the top, the bird, in spite of its ability to fly, will be an absolute prisoner. The reason is that a buzzard always begins a flight from the ground with a run of 10 to 12 feet. Without space to run, as is its habit, it will not even attempt to fly but will remain a prisoner for life in a small jail with no top.

The ordinary bat that flies around at night, a remarkably nimble creature in the air, cannot take off from a level place. If it is placed on the floor or flat ground, all it can do is shuffle about helplessly and, no doubt, painfully, until it reaches some slight elevation from which it can throw itself into the air. Then, at once, it takes off like a flash.

A bumblebee, if dropped into an open tumbler, will be there until it dies, unless it is taken out. It never sees the means of escape at the top, but persists in trying to find some way out through the sides near the bottom. It will seek a way where none exists until it completely destroys itself.

In many ways, there are a lot of people like buzzards, the bat, and the bumblebee. They are struggling with all their problems and frustrations, never realizing that the answer is right there "Above" them.

Season Our Ministry With Ethics

*Elizabeth de
Pacheco*

*Elizabeth de
Pacheco is
a ministry
wife in
Barranquilla,
Colombia.*



There are several concepts of ethics; we could summarize one of them by saying it's a fundamental system of values on which we base our lives. Every profession has a written code under which it operates, and it is convenient to have an understanding of what others expect of us in determined situations, but it's you who decides if you are going to act on that ethic norm or not.

In the ministry we women have responsibilities to work in conformity with the ethics in the ministerial role even though they're not written, although we know them as the golden rule. We can ask ourselves, "Why be ethical?"

We are lights in the world, and we live in communities where our testimony is manifested positively for the ethics rules that we have. We challenge others when we are ethical.

When we see other people's rights, we are applying ethics. This includes the small things in life.

As pastor's wives, we should know the different temperaments and how to deal with each one of them. We should ask for God's wisdom to do these. Each person wants to find in us a true friendship and spirituality that will attract others. Sometimes

people don't see themselves as good people, and they think we see them as they see themselves. Our hearts should be ports that receive all kinds of ships from many different lands.

When pastors and their families move to a different district, it's ethical for the membership to make the move as easy as possible. Leave the house they are going to occupy clean and in good condition. Leave a directory of addresses and telephone numbers of the leaders in the church and note the positions they occupy. Compile a list of addresses for pharmacies, laundries, hospitals, what days the garbage gets picked up, etc. Leave food for them to eat since they are new. All these details would be really appreciated.

We all know that we can't solve all our problems. If we have been treated cruelly, we still have to put a nice smile on our face. That doesn't mean we won't have hurt feeling or think negative thoughts. If our attitude is one of prayer and humility, and if we are trying to follow biblical principles, we will grow in love and forgiveness. It's good to keep what happened in the past and not comment on it. Being ethical could mean going the second mile when you are dealing with

difficult people. It is significant to be always grateful and value the efforts of other people.

Every denomination has its own ethics. We as Christians should follow the supreme example of Jesus of Nazareth. He taught us the perfect conduct in every moment—love—and He seasoned every minute of His life with love. Every pastor's wife should do the same. Matthew 7:12 says, "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets."

Keep in mind:

It is not convenient to stay in a church when you have been moved to another district.

Don't spend more money than you have. Debt can give a bad testimony in your church.

Don't be a go-between for the members of your church and your husband. If they have something to say, they can talk to him directly.

Don't share your personal life with members of the church.

If they ask you about the new pastor and his family, talk about only the good qualities, never the negatives.

Don't provoke criticism by letting someone see you with someone of the opposite sex who isn't your spouse.

Don't record a message without authorization.

If you accept an invitation from a couple from the previous church, it is important that the invitation go through the present pastor and that you stay at the present pastor's house.

Don't expect from someone else what you wouldn't do for yourself. If you invite a preacher, give him good and comfortable place to stay.

Smile with sincerity always.

When the wife of the visiting preacher sits alone, go sit with her and tell her how much she is appreciated.



God Knows

When you are tired and discouraged from doomed circumstances and situations—

God knows how hard you have tried.

When you've cried for so long and your heart is in such anguish—

God has counted your tears.

If you feel that your life is on hold and time has just passed you by—

God is waiting with you.

When you're lonely and your friends are too busy to call or can't understand—

God is by your side.

When you think you've tried everything and don't know where else to turn—

God has a solution.

When nothing makes sense and you are hurt, confused, or frustrated—

God has the answer.

If suddenly your outlook is brighter and you find traces of hope in life—

God has whispered to you.

When things are going well and you have much to be thankful for—

God has blessed you.

When something amazing happens and you find that special someone—

God has smiled upon you.

When you have a dream to follow and also a reality to live—

God has opened your eyes and called your name.

Remember that wherever you are or whatever you are facing now—

God knows!

Raising a P.K.: Will They Stay or Stray?

Scott Larson

At many Christian colleges, when a student gets into trouble, one of the first questions asked is, "Are your parents pastors or missionaries?"

Sadly, a decision to serve God full-time as a vocation seems to increase one's risk of family problems. Let's look at a few of the unique challenges placed upon the children of today's pastors and ministry leaders, as well as the steps we can take to safeguard our families from them.

Ministry places inordinate stress and outside expectations upon its leaders. The Fuller Institute of Church Growth published a survey of 2,500 pastors that revealed some disturbing findings:

- 90 percent of pastors work more than 46 hours per week.
- 80 percent believe that pastoral ministry is affecting their families negatively.
- 33 percent say "being in the ministry is clearly a hazard to my family."
- 33 percent felt burned out within the first five years of ministry.

I know that in the early years of our children's lives, I was only able to give them a fraction of my emotional energy. It wasn't that I didn't love them or want to give them more; I just didn't have it in me. The ministry had taken the best of what I had, and what was left

wasn't adequate for my children's needs. I was emotionally and relationally exhausted and in need of serious adjustments, even though those adjustments would require me cutting back in certain areas.

I discovered, though, that as I made the necessary adjustments to better meet the needs of my family, God also brought other called and qualified people who were able to share the load, and our ministry increased rather than decreased.

Many Christians place inappropriate expectations upon the children of Christian leaders. "I felt like we were always living under a microscope" is a line I've heard countless times from children who've grown up in ministry homes. Many feel tremendous pressure from Christians who don't see them as individuals but as "the pastor's kid." Rebellion against such expectations is common among those whose parents haven't yet learned to protect their children from a congregation's unrealistic expectations. While some children thrive in such an environment where they're seen as unique and given special status, others run the other way.

"One Sunday morning at church I couldn't find my son," recalls one pastor. "I looked all over, and then I saw him sitting in the car in the parking lot. As I marched out there

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I felt like yelling, but instead asked, “Marc, what are you doing out here?”

“These people don’t like me, Dad. And they expect me to be something I’m not just because you’re the pastor.” I knew he was right. Punk rock hair with umpteen earrings made him quite suspect, especially as the son of the pastor. But my wife and I had made a decision years earlier to not major on minors with our children. Hairstyle and fashion were not major issues for us.

“As I sat with my son in the car that morning, I renewed my vow to put him above the image of a pastor’s son that many of my parishioners were concerned with. I determined never to allow their perceptions to drive a wedge between my son and me, and especially between him and the Lord. That’s a decision I’m very thankful I made. We’ve since moved churches and I no longer have contact with most of those people. But, thank God, I still talk with my son every week on the phone, and we have a friendship that I treasure greatly.”

This raises an important question. Should you require your teenager to attend church? While most parents I interviewed tended to hold the reins rather loosely on this topic, they also worked very hard to accommodate their teenagers’ desire to attend a different church or youth group, knowing that it’s difficult to be both parent and pastor to a child. And because the stigma of being a pastor’s kid didn’t follow their children into another youth group or church, it was a more comfortable environment for many of them.

Another pastor’s family gave each of their high-school-aged children the choice of any two of three options: attending church, Sunday school, or youth group. Though their oldest two were very rebellious in their later teenage years, they

never rebelled against church because they felt they had a choice in the matter.

Children reared in ministry families are more prone to disillusionment with Christians and Christianity. A friend of mine who has only recently begun re-attending church tells me, “I see more integrity in the business world as an attorney than I ever saw on the missionary compounds where I grew up.”

His conclusion is not an isolated one. The Search Institute cites a new survey that indicates that one in every two children who are raised in a pastor’s home don’t go to church as an adult. This is a dramatic

We need to help our children understand the grim reality that Christians are sinners who struggle too, without them becoming completely disillusioned in the process.

increase over their previous study that said one in four pastor’s children abandon church as an adult.

When children are exposed to the many conflicts and personal attacks that happen in the name of God and Christianity, it’s no wonder so many conclude what one pastor’s son did: “I love you, Mom and Dad, and I love God. I just don’t want anything to do with church.”

We need to help our children understand the grim reality that Christians are sinners who struggle too, without them becoming completely disillusioned in the process.

Proactive Strategies

As we can see, there are many issues that put pastors and ministry leaders’ families at high risk for rebellion, not to mention the continual attacks of the enemy that target Christian leaders and their families. I know it scares me as I attempt to raise healthy, God-fearing, and loving children in such an environment. What proactive steps can we take to ensure we’re doing all we can to protect our families from casualty?

Try to live as normal a life as possible. Growing up, my wife, Hanne, was always nervous that teachers, classmates, or friends might ask what her parents did for a living. She loved her family immensely, but to have to say that they were missionaries, and then to explain what that was, was very embarrassing for her. “I just wanted to have a normal family,” she recalls. To be normal is a goal of every young person. And let’s face it—in our culture, having parents who are pastors, missionaries, or ministry leaders just isn’t normal. That doesn’t mean there aren’t many more advantages that our children can glean from growing up in such a family, but to expect them to be proud to explain to their friends what their parents do may be a bit unrealistic. That’s why playing other roles in our communities can be very helpful. Being also known as a coach, town committee member, or music teacher makes us far less intimidating for our children and their friends.

Though Christ is at the center of all that we do, every function we participate in doesn’t have to be spiritual or church-related. In fact, our children are more likely to be open to spiritual things if they see us engaging with them in their own areas of interest. One pastor I know regrets that the only activities they

ever participated in together as a family had to do with church. “My son was in a lot of sports, and my daughter played in the band. But I almost always had church functions happening on those evenings when they were performing. And now as they’ve gotten older, we just don’t have much in common.”

I know another pastor, though, who made it his goal to connect with each child in an area they were interested in. With one it was hunting and fishing, with another tennis, and with his third they assembled model cars together. All three are now grown, but they often participate in those same activities when they come together.

Allow your children the opportunity to struggle and explore. One pastor’s teenage son informed him he was going to look into Buddhism. Though shocked and profoundly disappointed, he didn’t overreact to his son’s announcement. Instead, they engaged in a very open dialogue about world religions that ended with his father saying, “I’m really proud of you for being willing to talk with me about this, Son. And for your deep concern to know what is true—not just accepting what your mother and I’ve taught you, but really seeking it out for yourself. I want to encourage you with what God has said in His Word, ‘Whoever seeks me with all his heart will find me.’ I’m confident that as you truly seek him, this will happen in your case as well.”

This approach was definitely not what this father was feeling at the moment, but it was the right thing to say to his son. His son already knew everything his father believed and how passionately he believed it. What he needed was permission to explore it for himself. As it turned out, his son didn’t really explore Buddhism very extensively at all. In fact, he now attends an alternative-

style worship church that better fits his interests in the arts and music than the one his father pastors. It’s a good church, and for that his parents are eternally grateful.

Recently I read a survey taken of people serving the Lord 10 years after high school. Two common denominators emerged: First, they were raised in an environment where they saw authentic faith lived out. And second, they rebelled against it for a time. Resistance to church isn’t necessarily the first step to atheism. In fact, when handled correctly, it’s a natural progression in the discipleship process.

Engage outside support. “On my first Sunday as pastor at Bethany Community Church, which was also our 30th wedding anniversary, my wife, Susan, and I found out that our daughter Stephanie was a heroine addict,” recalls John Vawter. “We had no idea.”

This painful time prompted the Vawters to organize a conference for couples in ministry who were struggling with a child’s alcohol or drug addiction. The response was astounding, as ministry families came out of the woodwork (see www.notalone.org for further information). According to research conducted by the Barna Research Group, 17 percent of the pastors in our country have children who are abusing or have abused drugs or alcohol. Even more alarming, 76 percent aren’t going anywhere for help.

I was at a pastors’ retreat recently where a pastor broke down in tears, recounting the pain he and his wife had been feeling, knowing that their oldest daughter was working nights as a dancer in a striptease bar. “I’ve felt so ashamed of her and of us. Even though we’ve known that Carrie has been doing this for two years, we’ve never told a soul.”


Immediately, two pastors came to him and explained how they had

gone through similar experiences with their daughters.

Satan has so much more power when he can isolate us and convince us that we’re the only ones struggling with issues like this. But bringing our pain into the light through expressing it to another serves to remove the sting (James 5:16). And more often than not, we find others who have gone, or are going through similar situations.

Deal with your own issues as they arise. Many people who enter full-time ministry carry a load of personal baggage with them. Perhaps this is because those who decide to enter the pastorate are often sensitive, broken people who’ve been through difficult issues. And that’s good. The Bible says that when God comforts us in our troubles, it’s so that we can comfort others in their troubles with the comfort we’ve received from Him (2 Corinthians 1:4).

But whenever someone has experienced significant pain, there are generally unresolved issues that linger. And there’s nothing quite like a rebellious child to bring those issues to light. Rather than trying to hide or deny them, I’ve found it most helpful to trust that God’s bringing them to light because He wants to bring us to a place of fuller healing and wholeness.

Several years ago I was bold enough to pray, “Father, conform me into the image of your Son.” I realized that, more than anything else, God has used my experience of re-parenting more than 30 troubled teens who have lived with us after being released from jail, to answer that prayer. Truly they have afforded me some of the best—and most difficult—days of my life. But more than that, because of them I’m not the same person I was 10 years ago—or even one year ago. And for that I’m most grateful. 

Journey to the Rock

Rita Stevens

I remember the day my husband called me and said that he had been asked to be the conference president. I retorted, "I told you I wanted to visit there, I didn't say I wanted to live there!" That's how I became the administrator's wife. That one little phone call caused my life to take a new direction.

Our two sons' reactions surprised us. They were teenagers at the time, and their ears were open to comments made by individuals. Though they loved and greatly respected the conference president, we didn't realize how much the comments of others affected our sons. They said, "Oh, Dad, you don't want to be a conference president. Everyone likes you, but no one likes a conference president." Notice they didn't say *the* president, but rather *a* president. Many times my husband and I discussed the statement our boys had made. Was there really an us-and-them attitude?

The morning after the startling news, as I took my morning walk, I prayed. Raising my hands in the air, I argued, "O Lord, how could you do this to ME! Don't you know that I will be looked upon as some type of spiritual leader? Surely you see the talented and gifted former administrator's wife is held in such esteem that it is a cruel joke to think I will be the replacement!"

I decided to ask the Lord to help me become the best I could be. I knew I did not have to be like the previous administrator's wife, but I did want to use the gifts God had given me. I wanted to be myself. Still, I felt inadequate to do the job. I desired a deeper relationship with Christ, one that was more open and one that I could share. I was awakened to the message of Acts 17:27, 28. Christ is never far from me. For in Him we live, and move, and have our being.

I was eager to be prepared. I wanted to be a good administrator's wife, and I had asked others for advice on how to achieve my goal. I was hoping for some tips or perhaps a list of things I should do. However, the only advice I got was to seek the Lord. At first I was disappointed with the advice. It would be years before I realized the advice I had been given was what I needed.

I began spending time with the Lord. I began each morning with my Lord and I ended each day with Him. I prayed continuously and He gave me strength. I came to the realization that God is always with me. I can talk to Him when I am cooking, showering, or driving. I can talk to Him when I am cleaning the house, working in the yard, or taking a walk. He is my constant companion.

The Lord showed me how to use the gifts He has given me. I

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remember an experience that occurred in our first church. As I was greeting a church member that first morning, she said, "Well, I suppose you play the piano." "No," I replied. "Then, of course, you sing," she went on to say. "No," I replied again. "Well, then, what do you do?" she exclaimed. I paused briefly, took a deep breath, and said, "I just love people." The conversation was over, but I must admit I felt unworthy. However, I now realize that the best gift the Lord has chosen for me is the ability to love people.

About six months after becoming an administrator's wife, I attended a camp meeting. There I was introduced to a portion of *Steps to Christ* that I had read before but never applied. I now begin each day with this prayer from *Steps to Christ*, pp. 70, 71: "Take me, O Lord, as wholly thine, I lay all my plans at thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my works be wrought [hammered, fashioned] in thee." I continue with Psalm 19:14: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer." I have found this is a prayer not to be used unless you really mean it. Sometimes His plans are not the same as your plans, and being flexible is necessary. It really reduces stress when you're following His plans instead of yours.

Still, I wasn't prepared for the comparisons I received in regard to the previous president's wife. I had what I considered to be healthy self-esteem, but it soon began to be whittled away. There was only one duty as an administrator's wife that I was expected to do—Women's Ministries! I had never participated in nor had any interest in women's ministry. Now, I was supposed to sit on the committee and help plan and advise on something I knew nothing about. The previous administrator's

wife's name came up often. As a matter of fact, it came up so often (in my thinking, at least) that I started to experience something I was not used to feeling—jealousy. Thanks, Lord, I thought, now I have a new thing to work on!

Fortunately, one dear lady at the meeting suggested I read one of the books the previous administrator's wife had written. Once I read the book, all I could do was praise the Lord. There was no jealousy left. Though I did not personally know the author, I loved her. Thankfully, I was given the opportunity to share this experience with her later. I now consider her a dear friend and one

Over the years, I have realized that many pastors and their families have a "them and us" attitude about the conference president. But it shouldn't be so. We are all united in the advancement of the great commission. We are a team.

of the most gifted writers I know. She has encouraged me to stretch beyond my comfort zone. I became involved in women's ministry, and I have received tremendous spiritual growth as well as numerous blessings. Through women's retreats, I have been given tools to grow my relationships with God and others, and they have increased my ability to love people.

Over the years, I have realized that many pastors and their families have

a "them and us" attitude about the conference president. But it shouldn't be so. We are all united in the advancement of the great commission. We are a team. Because we don't have a home church, I think of our congregation as all the pastors and their families. I have come to know so many wonderful pastors' wives, and I cherish each one. I love seeing the God-given talents used by each pastor's wife, whether she is a mother, secretary, nurse, lawyer, doctor, etc. I often think of Romans 12:3: "For by the grace given me, I say to every one of you. Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us." So I am content with the gifts He has given me and desire to use them to the best of my ability.

I would be amiss if I didn't mention criticism. That is something to which none of us are immune. Christ Himself endured criticism. Why should we be any different? I have dealt with criticism in various ways. God has allowed me to grow through criticism—sometimes gracefully, sometimes not. I never cease to be amazed at His forgiveness and, most of all, His divine compassionate love. May I endeavor to use each day as an opportunity to show that love to others. To show that love, I find it necessary to seek the Lord. First Chronicles 28:9 says, "...acknowledge the God of your father, and serve Him with wholehearted devotion and a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If **you** seek Him, He will be found by you. . ."



The Issue of Faith and Riches

*Lidio Vargas
Riquelme*

Lidio Vargas Riquelme has been a pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church for almost 22 years. He spent eight years as a missionary in Manaus-Amazonas, Brazil, and the rest of the time in Paraguay. He is currently working as a chaplain at the Adventist hospital in south Paraguay. His job includes public relations for the institution.

Lidio graduated in 1977 from the Universidad Adventista del Plata with a degree in theology. He received his Master's in Public Health at the Universidad Adventista de Chile in 1996.

He is married to Gloria Samaneigo. She is the principal of the Adventist school in Hohenau. They have three sons who are attending the University of Brazil.

Lidio loves to read, write, and sing. Many of his articles are published in Spanish and Portuguese in Adventist magazines. His favorite sport is basketball.



The guests sat around the table for dinner. The hostess, the pastor's wife, served rice, beans, and a little corn flour. When she started serving the food, she excused the watered-down soup. "I am sorry," she said, "the soup is so watered down, but you know, with our salary being so little, we have to live by faith. Isn't that right?"

I silently asked myself, "Does living by faith mean one must eat watered-down soup? Does it mean shoes must be worn until the soles are all worn out? Does it mean we have to wear old and clumsy clothes to give an appearance of humility? Does it mean we'll own a 'Pentecostal' car that preaches with loud noises in every corner; a car that has a failing engine that takes forever to start when it starts at all?" In reality, what is weak? The soup or the faith?

The matter of possessions, riches, and their relationship to faith is hard to distinguish, especially for God's servants, for this seems to be a sensitive issue. Those who believe that being wealthy is a sign of God's blessings preach that material riches are a sign of greater faith. They believe that if a believer is having financial difficulties, he or she is not exercising faith.

Others believe work produces riches, affirming that it is sufficient to work very hard to receive the blessings of God. They argue that the

reason people are so poor is because they're sitting under the shade of a mango tree sleeping on a hanging net. They say these types of Christians spend their days and nights just waiting for God's blessings.

Of course, there are some people who are on the opposite extreme of the spectrum. These people look with disdain at those who have material possessions. They believe that material possessions represent sin, and they attribute the majority of the evils of the world to an unfair distribution of riches. They believe that anyone who wants to be a serious Christian must give up all his material possessions and keep only the basic necessities. These people praise poverty saying, "The less we possess, the closer we are to God."

Many feel strongly about the relationship between Christianity and riches. This is especially true for those who work in the ministry. If the pastor or some member of his family lacks good taste and dresses awkwardly, they usually will fall under criticism. On the other hand, if the preacher's clothes are impeccable, there are some who make malicious conclusions about how well they are dressed.

Once a pastor found a car that was in very good condition even though it had several years of use. The car was safe, maintenance was cheap, and the cost was much less than a

brand-new car. However, the car was imported. The minister was happy and felt sure he had closed a good deal. He was very thankful God had blessed him on the business transaction.

After several weeks of owning this imported car, he started hearing some complaints and negative comments about how the pastor owned an imported car. One member applied the term "opulency." Another wondered how a pastor could afford such a car on a pastor's salary. Yet a third asked, "How can he justify buying a luxury car knowing there are so many hungry people in the world?"

Perhaps the pastor should have put a sign on the door of the car explaining all the advantages of buying the vehicle. Or perhaps the sign should say, "With this car, I saved God's money." The pastor felt angst over the situation. He called his family together and they talked about the situation. They prayed for God's guidance and leading about what to do.

What is God's position in these situations? Does He establish a limit for our material riches? Is there a kind of "roof" that we should not exceed if we want to please Him?

When God prepared the gallery of our biblical heroes of faith found in Hebrews 11, He mentioned Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Solomon. All of these men were rich. But He also mentioned another group of men and women who were tortured, lashed, mocked, arrested, tormented, and even killed.

Paul teaches that God wants us to live in wealth as well as in poverty; it is up to us to learn to adapt ourselves to each situation. "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things

through Christ which strengthens me" (Philippians 4:12, 13).

Certainly it is more difficult to live as a Christian in riches than to live in necessity. It is much easier to seek God and listen to His voice when we don't have food, when we have to rely and lean on Him for everything.

According to Jesus, having material blessings brings some risk. He said it is difficult for a rich man to enter into heaven. He also warned His people who were in captivity that when they would receive "the great and goodly cities, which thou hast builded not, and houses full of good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage" (Deuteronomy 6:10-12).

The writer of Proverbs presents a balanced version when he says, "Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say 'who is the Lord?' Or lest I be poor and steal and take the name of my God in vain" (Proverbs 30:8, 9).

Where is the balance between faith and riches? On what level can this balance be a risk? The right level can vary from person to person and can be determined by several factors. The first one is character. This issue is not how much a person should trust God to grant him some riches, but rather how much can God trust this person with wealth. He promised if we are faithful in a few, He can help us be faithful in abundance. There is another factor. Even if we have a good character and God can trust us, He knows exactly when and how much we need for living with dignity and to accomplish the mission He gave us.


So, what is the right amount of money for us to have? What are the proper clothes for us to wear? Which car should we buy? What kind of house should we live in? There are no easy answers to these questions. It depends on each individual situation, the function and level of the people involved.

Some principles should be observed:

We should not live in a level too superior, neither too inferior, to the people we work with. We should ask ourselves if our cars, houses, clothes, etc., contribute for the testimony of Jesus, or are they obstacles to the ministry?

We should guard ourselves against usury. We have a strong desire not to adopt the practices of the world. We should give to Jesus our money and let Him control this aspect of our lives in order for us not to be dominated by our natural desires. "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to His flock" (1 Peter 5:2, 3).

We should not be envious of others. We should be glad for what we have. The Bible does not say we should avoid riches, neither should we avoid poverty. The Bible says we should be glad with what we have. We should not compare our situations with others. Neither are we to covet what others have. The antidote against covetousness is to be convinced of divine justice. God does not always give us everything we desire in this life, but He blesses us in other ways. He never promised us we would have equal amounts of riches, but He did promise us He would provide for our needs.

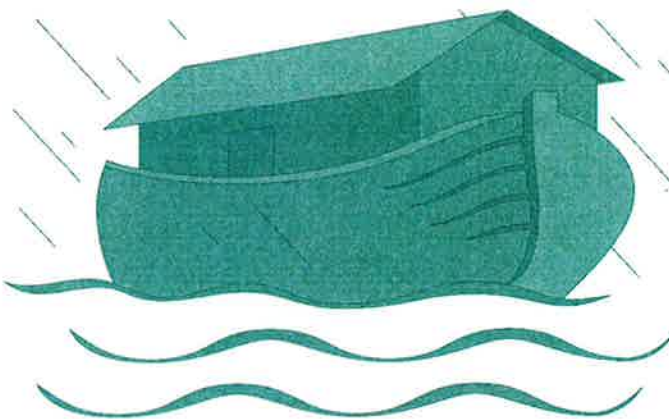
We should honor our Lord with our material possessions, and He will fill our cellars with all that we need. 



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