

LIFT

Ministry Group May Resource

Missing in Action

Ministry can survive your absence, your marriage might not.

As pastors sometimes we develop this “every time the doors are open” mentality about ministry. We think, if it is happening I need to be there, yet we don’t have the same convictions about our marriage and family. We believe that the church cannot survive without us, but don’t share that kind of concern for our marriage.

How many times have birthdays, anniversaries, kid’s programs, and vacations been missed because of ministry?

Discuss: What impact did missing those things have on your spouse and kids?

Now think about this...

How often do you miss ministry to make sure you don’t miss a birthday, anniversary, date night, vacation or kid’s program? What impact in comparison is that having on your ministry?

I wonder what our marriages would look like if we adopted a more “every time the doors open mentality” with our spouse/family.



Shop Talk:

Balancing Marriage & Ministry

At this year’s Stand Conference, Tierce Green made a powerful statement that goes hand in hand with our ministry focus this month:

“A successful ministry never makes up for an unhealthy marriage.”

Recently I was reading some commentary on John Wesley, founder of the the Methodist movement and a key figure in the First Great Awakening. What many people do not know about Wesley is that he, and his wife Molly, had a notoriously bad marriage.⁽¹⁾

Their marriage was characterized by continuous fighting. By 1758 she had left him—unable to cope with the competition for his time and devotion presented by the ever-burgeoning Methodist movement.⁽²⁾

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⁽¹⁾ <https://gregstier.org/what-your-marriage-says-about-your-ministry/>

⁽²⁾ <https://thecrippleate.com/john-wesleys-failed-marriage/>

Overcoming Loneliness

Ministry can be a lonely place.

In Lifeway Research's 2022 Greatest Needs of Pastors study, around 7 in 10 pastors noted that they are struggling to develop friendships. Later, Barna research in July 2023 shared that 65% of pastors struggle with loneliness. There is a strong correlation between overcoming loneliness and building intentional friendships.

It is significant for our marriages and ministries that we build intentional friendships. To do this, ministers must navigate several relational myths:

1. **Myth #1:** Pastors cannot be friends with people in their congregation. The idea that pastors should not have friends in the congregation comes from an unfortunate view of the church that sees it more as a corporate experience, rather than that of a community one. ⁽¹⁾

2. **Myth #2:** Activity is a remedy for loneliness. Busyness does not equate to togetherness.

3. **Myth #3:** Social media "likes" do not equate to friendship. Pastors need deep interpersonal relationships.

Discuss: Do you and your spouse have any close friends? Describe why they are life-giving to you. If you do not have close friends, discuss why it is hard to build friendships.

(1) <https://voices.lifeway.com/church-ministry-leadership/3-common-misconceptions-about-pastors/>

Greg Stier, speaking of John Wesley's marriage writes:

"A man who is considered by many to be the organizing force behind the First Great Awakening could not organize his life in such away as to prioritize his wife and could not bring a great awakening to his dead marriage."

Wesley, according to Stier, pathetically tried to excuse his long absences and cold demeanor behind a ministry mantra: "for the sake of the cause."⁽³⁾

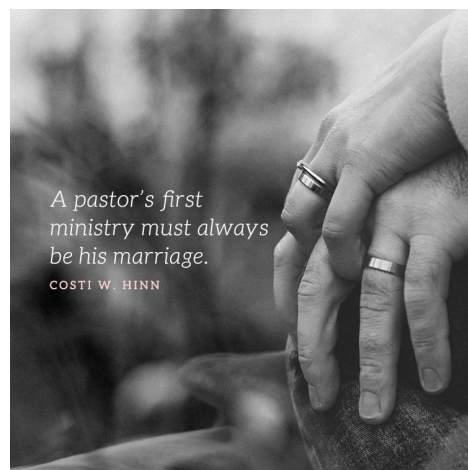
Discuss: In what ways do ministers attempt to rationalize spending so much time away from their spouses and families?

Unfortunately, many pastors, missionaries and evangelists allow ministry to take precedence over the responsibilities associated with marriage. However, this perspective is refuted by both 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 which each contend that prioritizing marriage is, in part, what qualifies us for spiritual leadership.

Discuss: How well do you feel you do balancing marriage and ministry? Which is most likely to suffer when life gets busy?

Ministry should be your mission, not your mistress.

It is impossible to dismiss completely the high demands that ministry places on your marriage, however, it is possible to manage and mitigate the imbalance by establishing boundaries, delegating, and managing people's expectations.



(3) <https://gregstier.org/what-your-marriage-says-about-your-ministry/>