



**BIVOCATIONAL & SMALL CHURCH
LEADERSHIP NETWORK**

BSCLN LEADERSHIP SERIES

**STRENGTHENING THE
MINISTER'S FAMILY**

By D. Tony Rankin
Therapist, Speaker, Author



STRENGTHENING THE MINISTER'S FAMILY

Your family should be the most important thing in your life. There is life outside the job as a minister and independent of the church. The minister's family needs to have an identity outside of the church role. Helping each family member set priorities, learn how to navigate from childhood to adulthood, and negotiate the unexpected situations in life are important elements in addressing the ongoing needs within the family structure.

Having a healthy family is not a secret formula but it does take intentionality or purposeful choices. Although there are some traits and characteristics of idealistic families, each family needs to decide what they want their family to look like. This will result in more meaningful interactions because there is ownership and less pressure to be like the family down the street or across the Fellowship Hall at church. This will lessen the power of comparison.

Healthy Family Checklist

Ask each family member to look at this list and choose five (5) items that would be the most important to them. Sit down together and talk about your answers. Are there any common answers? Talk about what plans you will make in order for some changes.

- Pray together
- Date nights
- Have at least one meal a day together
- Have a time out from electronic devices
- Have time together
- Have fun together
- Game night
- Work on having a healthy marriage
- Learn and demonstrate forgiveness
- Encourage one another
- Flexibility
- Respect

RELATING WITH THE CHILDREN

Being a parent can be great! Here are some things to keep in mind as you do the most incredible job (and gift!). Love your children and teach them right from wrong. Spend time with them everyday and eat together. Read to them or encourage them to read, and go to their schools. Play with them at every age. Talk to other parents about your experiences. Know who your children's friends are. Have fun together and live every day as if it's your last.

Historically the minister's kid has been accused of being a wild, disobedient, deviant rebel who nobody wanted their son or daughter to date, or a saint who did nothing wrong. Unfortunately, neither description comes close to defining who the minister's kid is or wants to be. In fact, the label MK (minister's kid) generally includes parent-induced pressure, congregation expectations, and personal distress.

Listed below are some hurdles that the minister's children must overcome.

“Be perfect”

The phrase “don't mess up” is frequently heard but difficult to accomplish. Behind the mandate is generally the fear that “if you do blow it, it will be a reflection on me.” The effects of fear of failure include withdrawal, avoidance, not trying, and blaming.

Allow your child to be less-than-perfect. Ministers tend to demand perfection of themselves and have similar expectations for the family members. Learn to relax, be comfortable with your humanness, and accept your child “as is.”

“Be involved in church”

When children hear: “Attend the weekly prayer breakfast at school. The Youth Planning Council meets right after choir. I need you to ‘step it up’ in choir and be a leader. Bible drill starts next week. The missions project to the homeless shelter will mean you have to miss your soccer game. And don't forget that Sunday School and worship are not options. Don't even ask to miss one of these events!” it appears that their life is preplanned. Being required to be involved is not nearly as much fun as choosing to do it on their own.

Directing, commanding, and paving the path of your child's involvement at church will result in animosity and a lack of interest. Suggesting, or even requiring that Sunday School or worship are “musts” is appropriate, but leaving some of the other choices to be made by the child might produce the same results without the coercion.

“Be a model student”

Not only is it important for the minister to have a child involved in all aspects of church life, but the bind of being a model student is typically required as well. Straight A's, student leadership, band, chorus, out-going personality, ball game attendance, and being well thought of by the teachers are often parental expectations.

The use of passive-aggressive behaviors is increased with

continued demands. These responses are subtle ways to repay the parents. State your preferences, but allow the child to succeed or fail on their own.

“Stay in good mood”

The demand or expectation for the minister’s children always to be in a good mood may reflect the minister’s fear that his emotions might be mirrored, or that he doesn’t have better control of his kids, or that they might reveal the true mood of the house.

Allow your children to have a broad range of emotions: happy, sad, mad, surprised, afraid, and everything in-between. Encouraging them to express their moods will decrease the amount of hypocrisy, resentment, anger, and confusion that results when a parent exhibits a “do-as-I-say and not-as-I-do” attitude.

“Like everything at the church”

Is everything at the church perfect? Churches are places where imperfect people meet to attempt to honor God. Parents frequently expect their children to pretend that everything is likeable and acceptable. This seems to give them a false sense of “We really like everything, too.”

Admit that the church is not perfect and therefore everything does not have to be liked. Be brave and demonstrate this belief to your teenager by stating several of the unlikeable aspects you struggle with. This will develop admiration and respect and eventually appreciation for what you do as a vocation.

“Be willing to work 40 hours a week at the church”

Dragging the child to everything on every night in order to be accepted by everybody is a dead-end street. Regularly helping to stuff bulletins, stack music, set up chairs, prepare food for parties, gas up the vans, and decorate the fellowship hall seems like work to a child. That’s because it is!

Give the child a choice of going to help at the church or staying home to play. Alternatives seem to breed appreciation and freedom,

both of which are vital to a child growing up with a healthy opinion of church and its expectations of leaders.

“Know the Bible”

Participating in Bible Drill, Vacation Bible School, and Sunday School is important and beneficial to learning about the Bible, but it can become a hindrance to church interest when it is forced as a way of making sure the child knows as much as or more than anybody else. It might be a pressure to teach them things about the Bible because there is no time to teach the Word at home.

Discuss the importance of knowing about the Bible. Be a model of Bible knowledge and make it part of your everyday life and conversations. Discuss Biblical issues at the table, during appropriate occasions while watching television, and in times of need. Make it more than preparation for some Bible Challenge Contest--make it meaningful and useful.

“Be a Performer”

A good performer seems to validate a minister's worth, talent pool, and ability to do the skill-training aspect of parenting. The Little Preacher Boy, Talented Song-Leader-In-Training, Premiere soloist, or Pious Prayer seems to give the minister the prideful and false impression that “I've done a good job.”

Ministers' children shouldn't perform anymore than other children and should only do so if they want to. The minister's child would rather feel unconditionally accepted by mom and dad than from any size congregation.

“Be willing to keep the lineage going”

How many times have you heard said, “Yeah, I'm a fifth-generation minister and we can't wait to see what area of ministry our son picks when he gets in junior high school.” There's nothing wrong with desiring your child to respond to God's calling, but be aware of doing so to validate your service and effectiveness or for the novelty of adding another generation to the line.

Encourage your child to make his or her own choices. Give them opportunities to experience a variety of ministries and vocations that serve others. More people minister outside the walls of the church who are not on church payrolls than you have titles of “Minister of...” Keep the relationship free of pressure to “grow up and be just like...”

“Understand parents frustrations”

Scores of parents insist their children should be able to anticipate and understand the parent’s mood. When a child doesn’t respond, the backlash occurs. Most children do not develop the ability to discern and extrapolate feelings until they are adults.

Don’t expect your children to understand your feelings. As they mature, share with them what you’re experiencing and attach emotions to it so they can recognize your mood correctly. Accept the fact that they need to be detached from your frustrations and encourage them to be free from the stress of ministry and your work. Get an accountability partner or group, and share your pain and frustration with them.

Being the child of a minister can be a privilege, but there are many hurdles to deal with in the family. You never get finished running the parenting race but it’s never too early to start and never too late to finish strong.

Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder-ADHD

By now you may already know if your child struggles with ADHD or ADD. You’ve probably looked up the symptoms online or maybe your pediatrician has helped you. Here are some things to look for and consider. Know if your child struggles with impulsivity, hyperactivity, or inattention or some combination. It is important to know if it’s because your child has a lot of energy or is an obnoxious teenager. You always want to notice how much of the behavior is related to resistance, a lack of confidence, anxiety, hyperactivity, concentration, anger control, impulsivity, or a concern over self-worth.

If your child does have ADHD make sure you speak simply and when necessary talk with them privately and get connected with them.

Have them repeat instructions when necessary. Understand that they can't help themselves at times.

Helping Children Deal With Anger

Anger is frustration with not being able to fix or change something. So what makes a child angry? It could be because they can't do what they want or get something they would like. Sometimes children get mad at their parents' demands. They may be afraid of certain events. The child may feel helpless, abandoned, or out of control. Are they tired or worried?

Help them express a broad range of emotions and learn to express them and feel safe in doing so. They may demonstrate their feelings by tightening their jaw or clenching their fist. Model responsible anger management and help them know how to stay calm.

Bullying

Bullying can include inappropriate behaviors from another child that might be abusive racially, physically, verbally, or sexually. It could be demonstrated through social exclusion, threats, lies, or false rumors. One out of seven, or 15%, of all children and students are mistreated by their peers at some point.

Be a parent who cares enough to be available to listen to children who may be bullied. Be the adult who says, "I believe you and I'm going to help stop the problem." As a parent say, "Don't give up. It's going to get better." Compassionately add, "I love you and you are perfect and lovable."

MARRIAGE TO EACH OTHER

Meeting the Needs of Your Spouse

There is no sick or wrong person in your relationship. Both of you contribute to some degree. The best place to start is asking them what they want. Below is a list of some things they may want. Ask them and then don't put them down for what they say.

- _____ Affection
- _____ Admiration
- _____ Attraction
- _____ Conversation
- _____ Domestic Help
- _____ Family Priorities
- _____ Financial Support
- _____ Honesty and Openness
- _____ Recreational Similarities
- _____ Sexual Fulfillment

When you talk with them about their list or yours, speak the truth. Realize that trying to keep them happy doesn't have a long-lasting, meaningful connection. Placating or just using words that make them feel good prolongs the agony and interferes with emotional intimacy because of the deception of not speaking the truth. When your spouse tells you what they need, believe and understand the list. Refuse to nod your head or just give lip service; instead, work at understanding how they feel.

“I Will Never Forget You”

One of the ways to enrich your marriage is to know to simply communicate your love. Start by saying “I care for you.” See all conflict as relational and a way to recognize your heart-felt compassion. Refuse to argue and avoid commands and demands. Say, “One thing that I haven't told you lately that I care about is _____.”

Vulnerable discussions will also strengthen the relationship. Trust each other enough to discuss tough topics and state your expectations. Keep these conversations within the family. Try saying these words, “One thing that is hard to talk about is _____.”

Remind your spouse of how much you need them. Accomplishing things together and understanding what belongingness means. Say, “I need and want you to _____.” Discuss social contracts that are necessary to accomplish tasks.

As you tell your spouse that you love them, be clear to them that you will never quit. Instead of just using the phrase, “I love you” add, “One thing you do that is loving is _____.”

Time Management

Most adults are stressed because they fail to have a balanced sense of time management. Try to find balance between fun, taking care of yourself, and work. There are 168 hours in a week. Ideally find a way to spend 56 hours in each area. Take a few minutes to write down the number of hours that you currently spend in each category. Then, redistribute the number of hours to find a better sense of balance.

Know the Love Language

If you have the book or can access a copy of *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman, read it and take the Five Languages Test and see what your love language is. Have your spouse do this, too. If you don't have the book and can access it online, go to www.5lovelanguages.com/profile/ Score your profiles and learn something about your spouse.

Speaking the Language of Your Mate

Once you learn what your spouse's love language is, remember it and read about what it means and ask them to talk about it. What is it? Quality Time, Physical Touch, Receiving Gifts, Words of Affirmation, or Acts of Service. When you realize what it is, know that you need to do it all of the time. At home. At church. During emotions. During stressful times. Any other time, too. Knowing your spouse's love language will help you take disagreements seriously and should push you toward saying, "Putting your needs before mine means more to me than anything else in the world."

Marriage is Not a Fight

Phrases like "Living happily ever after," "For better or worse," and "Until death do us part" are encouragements to work out conflict in marriage.

1. Both spouses need to agree that times will not always be easy.
 - Make sure there is a beginning and end to all fights (container--don't let it spill over into other areas of life)
 - You will not always see eye to eye
 - Talk about things you do agree on
 - Avoid the competition of the battle

2. Accept the fact that you are not married to a perfect person.
 - Mistakes do not make a person a bad person
 - You were chosen and you chose in spite of faults
 - Toleration, being patient, accommodating, communicating commitment and love

3. Anticipate that things will not always go your way.
 - Look for signs and triggers that all is not going well (irritation, interruptions, debating)
 - Drop hostage and project mentalities
 - Expect passions and disagreements sometimes in the same night
 - Be willing to talk about them and refuse to harbor them
 - Setting Marital Goals

Find a time when both of you are willing to sit down and talk about some things you would like to accomplish in the near future and years away. Start by just listing as many things as you can think of and don't worry about having too many ideas or being unrealistic. Do more than just talk about them, write them down. Make this fun by taking a notepad to your favorite place to get coffee, to a park nearby, or to a fun place to eat.

After you have made a list of everything you can think of, place them in one of four categories. Immediate, short-term, intermediate, and long-term. This may be an interesting conversation because your spouse's ideas and time frames may be different than yours, but that's o.k., and is probably not news to you anyway. Hopefully you will find some fun in the honesty and vulnerability of this discussion.

Once you have made your list, put them into categories, and when you feel like you've exhausted your ideas and possibilities, decide on about four or five things in each grouping that you would be willing to set as goals. (Don't throw away the long list of ideas because you may need it in the future.) Ask yourselves, "What are we doing to get what we want?" You will more than likely realize the answer is "not much!" The exciting thing about this reality is that now you are ready to discuss what needs to happen to make each of the goals a possibility. With each goal decide what plans need to be put in place to make the goal more than just an idea--rather the positive outcome of mutual efforts. Find a time each month to look at the list and discuss what needs to happen next. Keep a list in a place that is visible to both of you--the refrigerator, the coffee table next to the television remote, or the kitchen table.

When you complete one of the goals, do two things—celebrate,

then replace it with another one from the list of categories, or make some new goals you hadn't previously mentioned. If it is something from the immediate list like eating out or going to a social event, make plans for what will be the next thing to do in the near future. After accomplishment of a goal, replace it immediately with a new one. But most importantly celebrate the accomplishment and enjoyment of getting something done together. The celebration in itself will encourage you to be connected to your spouse in a new way.

Know and be Known

In Psalm 46 the psalmist relays what God wants...stillness and knowing who He is. "Be still and know that I am God." In reality being known and knowing the other person is paramount to a close relationship.

Try this. Think of something from your childhood that your spouse does not know and tell him or her. Ask them to tell you something, too. This is just a start. Telling each other information that they don't know will improve your relationship and the trust factor between the two of you. Don't wait until you have enough money, you are 65, or until the kids are gone from the house.

Be Intentional

When expressing your love for spouse and desire to know more about them, be deliberate in your words and attempts to be intimate. Say, "It feels loving to me when you..." Allow them to answer even if you have to sit in silence for several minutes if necessary. Love is willing to wait. Try asking or stating, "Our best trip together was ... because ..." These are several possibilities of speaking with purpose. Don't encourage your spouse to leave or find somebody else.

Stating Expectations

The biggest problem in marriages is not sex, money, or communication. The reason that most persons wind up in marital distress or in counseling is related to resentments. Resentments are nothing more than broken expectations, intentional or not. When you got married, you had expectations about having a partner—expectations that you got from your parents, books that you had read,

friends, your premarital counseling, or your own thoughts and dreams. When those expectations are not met they turn into resentments. Make a list of things you resent (big or little) about your spouse. Talk with your spouse about your lists. Rewrite every resentment into an expectation and see if it is realistic or not. This would be a great exercise to do with a professional counselor. The conversation will end up completing the phrase, “I need and expect...”

Offering and Receiving Forgiveness

Forgive (most want to bury the hatchet but remember where they buried it!). It is better to be happy than right. Letting go of having to win and being in control is part of the forgiveness process. It does not mean that you are expected to, or could ever forget, what has happened in the fight, but it does mean turning loose of the issue that has hurt and angered you and being willing to put it into perspective--letting it be a part of your history and story--not being unwilling to continue to make it a part of the present, unless it is repeated behavior. By making eye contact during these conflicts you are allowing the other to know you more and it gives you a better chance to know them better, too.

Say to your partner, “It is hard to forgive because...” Talk about your responses and exchanges with each other. Both spouses should complete this phrase.

Learn What Intimacy Is

Intimacy is about more than the sexual experience. It includes being emotionally close about spiritual matters, finances, emotions, successes and failures, hurts and celebrations, and hopes for the future. It requires two persons sacrificing, having mutual submission, and having joint respect for each other.

The most troubling hindrances to intimacy are criticism, resentment, passivity, dislike of self, spectating in conversation and relating to each other, and lack of non-sexual touch.

FOR EVERYBODY IN THE FAMILY

The Sandwich Generation

47% of Americans are assisting aging parents and raising children, too. Providing financial support, care and emotional help, and maintaining family responsibilities is tough. This is called the Sandwich Generation. Usually this is not a sudden occurrence because aging and youthfulness occur gradually. When you see it beginning or even when you are in it, begin to talk about it with your spouse, your aging parents, and your children. Discuss the changes that may take place, big or little, and don't pretend it's not happening.

When addressing your aging parents keep dignity and independence in mind. They may not understand issues from your vantage point and since you haven't been in their shoes it will take effort to realize what they are experiencing. Find ways to help them maintain some independence while it is possible and look for chances to help them experience self-worth and self-respect. Another part of raising children and assisting older parents is the financial responsibility you will encounter. Decide how much you are capable of spending and address these extra expenses with your spouse, if you are married, and make a plan to protect your assets. Remember there are organizations that are in place to help with elderly needs and are there to assist you in knowing what the resources are that agencies provide. There are services in your local area as well as some nationwide ones. Find a helping hand by contacting:

www.eldercare.gov or call (800) 677-1116.

www.aarp.com

www.ncoa.org

Always make it a point to express your love to your children as well as your parents. Although you may feel like you are giving all you can, there will be times when each part of the Sandwich Generation will feel left out and neglected. Use notes, texts, phone calls, and face-to-face moments as opportunities to demonstrate your affections toward each family member. Take time for yourself as well. Like the adage that the flight attendant says prior to taking off in the plane, "If

the air masks drop, place yours on first and then assist those around you”. If you aren’t well, it will be hard for you to manage all of the stress and fatigue that comes with taking care of others. Be well, first.

Hear and record the stories of children and aging parents. Sometimes it is hard to remember the meaningful stories after the fact yet these words are the very things that will be what you cling to years afterwards. Journal your experiences as a way to address and release your own emotions. These emotions will include changing roles, fears and the unknowns, and losses and changes.

Special Needs Children

It can be overwhelming to have a child with a special need, whether it is a physical handicap or intellectual disability. At the same time it is tiring to provide around the clock caregiving, the congregation struggles with knowing how to best help and demonstrate compassion. First, understand what your needs are. Make a list of everything that you need help with including time away, simple chores, and conversation. When persons ask what you need or how they could help, tell them. Refer to your list. They are indicating a desire to help when they ask you. Responding with “You can’t do anything” or “nothing” discounts their request to help and disallows them a chance to give when you desperately need them to.

Get involved with an area support group for other families who have similar needs. Part of the loneliness and isolation you’re experiencing is related to the avoidance of reality and the painful losses you feel over what you expected when you chose to have children. Find some healing with others who understand because of their similar experiences.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a term that many professions use to protect their clients from legal issues and is offered as a version of self-protection. Although the minister’s family is not bound to this ethical rule, it is important that the concept be used nonetheless. When some piece of information (or even a deep, dark secret) is shared with someone in the family, it should stay there. It should not be used in the prayer circle’s sharing of prayer requests nor should it be told to

your best friend. Remember friends don't usually have the ability to keep secrets. To say, "You've got to promise me that you won't tell anybody!" doesn't work 100% of the time. When family members are trusting enough to tell the painful truth, they have become vulnerable and shouldn't dread your bringing it up in the future in a hurtful or shaming way or as a way to win an argument or make a point.

Coping with Grief and Loss

It hurts to lose somebody! Everybody has, will, and knows somebody who is experiencing grief. Know what to do, how to hurt, and when to ask for help. Read Psalm 27:4-5. Life is short and this is what we have. Grief can destroy you or help you to focus. A healthy mindset can help you appreciate what you have. Grief may feel like it's all for nothing or help you realize it was everything. Refuse to dismiss what you experienced as a married person or in any relationship and recognize it was a gift. Grief is forever and it is a part of who you are. You will never forget your loss which means you must integrate the loss into what you have left and all of your new experiences, too.

Grief should not consume you. There is no need for elimination of the pain or memories but there needs to be a sense of recovery and a new interest in daily life. As you make these adjustments, you may have intense concerns and your despair may cause you to feel irrational. Remember, grief and love are joined. You never get one without the other. It's the price you pay for love.

Loneliness and Isolation

What's the difference? Although they can be connected isolation is normally a choice whereas loneliness is often the result of a disappointing moment in relationships. Consider why you choose to isolate. Sometimes a fear of being hurt again results in the desire to isolate. Occasionally it is an avoidance of abandonment and oddly enough it could be associated with some version of superiority. It can be a result of shame and depression and isolation provides protection and a safe place to hide.

Loneliness on the other hand is a sadness because there is nobody to share hurts or disappointments. This can happen even if you are surrounded by persons. Our need to connect is a part of our human

DNA, and nobody wants to go home and feel alone. Whether you are alone because you have lost someone you love or they will not connect with you, you feel like an outcast, or your depression has consumed your life, loneliness darkens your outlook on relationships.

In both cases, look for ways to bravely interact with others. Actively get involved in small groups in and out of the church. Look for ways to find friends in the community that aren't necessarily attached to the church. Talk about your feelings of loneliness and isolation with your spouse. Seek counseling before you begin to feel desperate. Notice your self-deflating thoughts. Find others who are like you, which may be a minister or ministers' support group, family members, or in community events. When you are invited, show up. It may feel awkward at first and difficult, but connecting with others is a must in order to overcome isolation and loneliness.

Helpful Resources

"Maintaining Healthy Relationships As a Minister," Leadership Series booklet, is a resource for ministers and their relationships. It can be obtained by contacting the BSCLN office at:

BSCLN
PO Box 111744
Nashville, TN 37222-1744
615.490.3107
bscln.center@bscln.net

P.A.L.S. is Partners Assisting the Lord's Servants. This group is a support group for spouses of ministers. PALS is a great help as well. You can contact them through bscln.net.

NOTES

NOTES



CONTRIBUTOR BIO:

D. Tony Rankin is a clinical therapist, speaker, author, husband, father, and grandfather. He has spent the last 24 years in private practice addressing the needs of families, couples, and individuals who struggle with relationship issues, marriage conflict, parenting, trauma, anxiety and mood disorders, and dissatisfaction with life. He speaks at churches, corporations, schools, and civic groups on these topics as well. Prior to 1991 he was a Minister to Youth and Children in Nashville, TN. He has published over 300 articles for magazines and newspapers, written eight books, and answers crisis calls for youth camps, churches, and businesses all across America. He has been married for 33 years and has three adult children, one daughter-in-law, and a grandson. He loves to collect baseball memorabilia and walk.



**BIVOCATIONAL & SMALL CHURCH
LEADERSHIP NETWORK**

**PO BOX 111744
NASHVILLE, TN 37222-1744**

**WWW.BSCLN.NET
615-490-3107**