

9 Ways Pastors Let Ministry Harm Their Marriage

By Chuck Lawless on Aug 18, 2015 06:00 am

Too many of us know a ministry couple that has divorced. I encourage pastors to be aware of ways we sometimes let ministry harm our marriages – and be ever alert to not let disaster hit their own home. If you are not a pastoral leader, let these words lead you to pray for your pastors.

1. **Too little energy is left for relationship building at home.** Pastors serve others in various difficulties of life such as hospitalization, relational conflict, job loss, and death. When you minister to others all day, you have little left to give to your spouse when you get home.
2. **The home becomes the one place left to complain.** Think about it—pastors have few places to let their guard down, share their frustrations, and work through their occasional anger. Home is the one place where they can open their emotional vault – and their spouse must bear the brunt. Even the most gracious spouse will likely grow weary at some point.
3. **Spouses see us serve others but then feel neglected themselves.** They see us sacrifice for others, give time to others, listen to others, and pray for others. At the same time, they long to be prioritized, heard, led, and loved. Many, though, will never speak up for fear of being a hindrance to their spouse’s ministry.
4. **Ministry interruptions eventually get old.** I’ve watched young couples adjust well when the minister must take a phone call at dinner or miss a family gathering for an emergency. However, when we allow those interruptions to multiply over the years while we do nothing to protect our relationship, even the gentlest spouse can become resentful.
5. **We pray with others, but not with our spouses.** I need not linger long here to make the point. If our spouses have to ask us for prayer, we have relegated them to the position of church member rather than life partner. Trouble lurks.
6. **A spouse becomes a ministry trophy.** It’s great when both spouses use their giftedness as a ministry team. It’s fun and fulfilling. It’s not so good, though, when we see our spouse primarily as a trophy to build up our ministry.
7. **We never relax with our spouse.** Even as I write these words, I feel the tug of Holy Spirit conviction. My guess is that most of us relaxed and enjoyed our dating days. When pastoral workloads replace those relaxing times, we risk harming our marriages.
8. **We treat our children as “the pastor’s kids” more than “our kids.”** The former prioritizes our ministry reputation over our children; the latter rightly gives our children priority. Most spouses quickly become protective when we mess up these priorities.

9. **Others of the opposite gender turn to us for comfort.** They seek us for guidance. They share their pain. They respect us as the “men of God.” The attention becomes attractive, and we convince ourselves that the next step is acceptable. That’s really stupid.

In what other ways might pastors allow ministry to harm their marriage?