

Marcus Honeysett (ed. Richard Collins)

# The Leader's Home

(Part One)

*The following is an edited version of an address given to the All Souls Langham Place School of Evangelists in November 2011. This is Part One. The main audience was evangelists but the talk is equally applicable to other leaders in local churches.*

## **An evangelist's wife once came to me in tears.**

Please would I persuade her husband's boss to force her husband to re-evaluate his priorities and spend more time with her? Given my own knowledge of the situation, I didn't consider this a selfish request. Over a long period of time, he had been using the Lord's work as a justification for life habits which dishonoured his wife and were damaging to his family life. I went to see his boss to discuss her concerns. It wasn't his responsibility, he said. The wife needed to address this, not him. Excuse me?

Here's another story.

I once supervised two women evangelists who regularly worked between 250 and 300 hours a month. They were often unhappy, struggled with low-level illness, and had no time for recreation, family or friends. Furthermore, they resented the work they were doing, and maybe to some

degree resented the Lord. When I suggested that 200 hours a month was much more sustainable, I was met with the reply that 200 hours was insufficient to complete their work. I then had to listen to some high-sounding claptrap about it being better to burn out than rust out. Hudson Taylor was regularly wheeled in to defend their choice of life and ministry patterns.

My response? I tore pages out of their diaries, and after a term had cut down their work to around 200 hours a month. They were happier, healthier, enjoying their lives in ministry, as well as the Lord, and had time for recreation, family and friends. Most interestingly, they were doing almost exactly the same work. All the rest had been the law-of-diminishing-returns. They had been desperately filling their hours in an attempt to justify their existence, first to their supporters, and then to themselves.

These are two examples of ministry idolatry – or

justification by ministry – driven by wrong expectations or a failure to find measures to evaluate success.

## Wrong Expectations

In both cases, expectations were critical and these expectations were wrong. They were driven by two factors:

1. The felt need to prove our worth
2. Comparison with others

The comparisons game in Christian leadership is foolish and spiritually deadly. There are few things more depressing than comparing yourself to a 25 year-old, single, male evangelist who thinks success is achieved by demonstrating to all and sundry that he is always busy and exhausted.

As though that qualifies as a sign of godliness. Not all 25 year-olds fall into this category, I hasten to add.

Perhaps you construct an idea of the perfect ministry. I know I do. You know, a person with the capacity of Hudson Taylor, the preaching skill of Don Carson, the theological rigour of St. Paul, the conversion rate of George Verwer, and of course, the holiness of Jesus. Measuring myself against this picture leads to the instant realization that I'm a catastrophic failure and the expectation that my heavenly report card probably reads 'must do better.'

Most of us have a much stronger theology of ministry than we do of home. It's why we feel the pressure of ministry more keenly. Unfortunately, the casualty is frequently home life, family and friends. In my work with Living Leadership, I have observed an alarming trend among those who leave church leadership: their spouses feel neglected. They also feel that they can't voice their concerns without being branded as unfaithful to the Lord.

I started making a note of this trend about 6 years ago. Spouses were frequently under-valued and their voices were not being heard. The tragedy

was also that in their communities, the leaders' families were becoming the least spiritually fed people. I observed that spouses regularly carry the greatest burdens in return for the least input. And if you let patterns like this persist unchallenged for 15 years, you have a recipe for disaster. The goal of evangelism is for Christ to be formed in people's hearts by faith. It is union with Christ. The whole purpose of Christian ministry is help people become worshipers, witnesses in his body, the Church. What is the clearest picture we have on earth of Christ and the Church? Marriage.

Let's turn to Ephesians 5, which we know so well. The intimacy here between husbands and wives is almost as close as it comes in our human experience to the intimacy enjoyed by the members of the Trinity. Yet I say 'almost' because there

is one experience of intimacy which is even closer than this, and that is the union between Christ and the church. Marriage itself, even gender – male and female – were created to illustrate that union as profoundly as possible this side of Heaven. My point? Don't trade off ministry and family.

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If union with Christ is our goal, and this marriage picture is the clearest illustration, then I contend that when we start to make trade-offs between ministry and family – and for those who are married, our marriages in particular – we have taken a huge false step. All the alarm bells ought to be ringing.

Given the marriage metaphor, it should come as no surprise to hear the church described as God's family. Families are created to help us enjoy God's family, just as gender is created to aid us in our longing for the Great Wedding. Eph. 4 says that leaders – including evangelists – are given to the church so that it grows up into spiritual maturity in Christ. It should come as no surprise to hear in 1 Tim 3, 2 Timothy 2, and Titus 1 that family is a cradle for faith and that leadership in the family is the clearest indication of suitability for leadership ministries in the wider family. Nor should it be



a surprise to hear leaders referred to as fathers among the flock in 1 Cor 4:15 or both parents in 1 Thessalonians 2 – as a mother gently caring for children, a father exhorting children.

There are clearly lots of parallels between being a father at home and leadership ministries in the family of God. Giving attention to our home life, therefore, is not only a proper and vital thing to do for its own sake – though it is that – it is also critical for biblically functioning churches. It makes sense of the office of elder. It models marriage and family to others. It prevents prayers being hindered and satisfies the soul. And it is a vital apologetic for the gospel because it uniquely displays the mystery of Christ's love for the church. People are meant to look at our lives, look into our homes, and see the difference that union with Christ makes there.

Right in the nitty-gritty and messiness of everyday life.

**Marcus Honeysett** is founding director of Living Leadership. He has extensive experience as a speaker and writer and as a church elder for training and discipleship. His books include *Finding Joy* (IVP, 2005) and *Fruitful Leaders* (IVP, 2011). Marcus is married to Ros and they have one son.

## About Living Leadership

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