

Preserving Proper Priorities



"I can't do this anymore!"

Susan's frantic cry riveted my attention. The young pastor's wife anxiously watched her toddler run through the house as the baby began to cry in the next room. I had stopped by to give a book to her and caught her in a manic ministerial mode. Susan went on: "I'm supposed to be at church in 45 minutes to help with this week's Bible study. I was loading the car and was just about ready to leave when the phone rang. It was one of our members who was in crisis and needed to talk. My husband beeped into the call to ask me to bring some things to him when I come to church. I finally got off the phone, gathered my husband's items, and was headed to the car when the baby threw up all over himself. I was just getting ready to change his clothes when the doorbell rang. What am I going to do?"

That's not an untypical parsonage scene. Very rarely do things go as planned or according to schedule. How do we juggle the pressures and responsibilities? Can we be all things to all people? Absolutely not. Then how do we draw proper and godly boundaries?

The demands on Kay Warren and her husband, Rick, with their huge congregation at Saddleback Church in Lake Forest,

She Can't Even Play the Piano!

California, and their diverse ministries are enormous. Read what Kay has to say about the pressure.



We laugh at the absurdity that any of us could ever be the perfect woman. But I know that most of us have had that dream. This can be especially true of ministry wives. Because of unrealistic expectations, many times we overcommit ourselves and become too busy.

There are some things that let me know when I'm too busy. My husband, Rick, will confirm that these are, I'm sorry to say, real examples from my life.

- You know you're too busy when you have not emptied your mailbox in three days.
- You know you're too busy when you walk in the door and the dog growls at you because he doesn't recognize you.
- You know you're too busy when you mumble, "Tomorrow night, Honey," for a week.
- You know you're too busy when your pots and pans have cobwebs on them.
- You know you're too busy when the guy at the drive-through window at Taco Bell knows you so well he's willing to loan you money.
- You know you're too busy when your microwave prints a personal "Hi, Kay!" message on the screen.
- You know you're too busy when you use your bathtub as a planter.
- You know you're too busy when you stop shaving your legs—it just takes too much time.

The list could go on and on. The truth is that damage results from overloaded lives. Almost all women today (particularly ministry wives) feel guilty because we

can't do it all or be all things to all people. Some might say, "I'm OK with my career, but my health is falling apart." Others might say, "I'm doing OK as a mom, but my marriage is falling apart." The part that's not OK can become very destructive.

As ministry wives we can say, "I'll do whatever it takes to find margin, to build balance, and to stop the overload that has been so destructive and damaging. Simply pray, saying, *God, whatever it takes, I'm willing to do or not do that. I'm willing to do whatever it is You reveal to me the rest of this day, the rest of this week—whatever it takes, God. I'm willing to make changes, because I want what You've promised—life to the fullest.*

Then as ministry wives we'll be able to begin to experience what He has for us as we begin to delight our hearts in Him.

—Kay Warren



Most ministry wives can relate to Kay's list. Each of us would certainly agree with her that there are not enough hours in the day to accomplish all that we need to do. Some guidelines on how to complete those necessary assignments and yet reserve time with the Lord and for ourselves could include these:

- Get organized and into a routine. For example, plan menus for future meals as much as possible.
- Make time for fun.
- If you're a morning person, set the alarm clock to sound 15 minutes earlier so that you can be sure to have your quiet time with the Lord.
- Try to set aside at least a one hour each week to pamper yourself.

She Can't Even Play the Piano!

Carol Rhoads served in pastoral ministry with her husband, Ross, for more than 20 years. Although she is one of the blessed ones who plays the piano beautifully, that ability did not exempt her from encountering some of the problems and issues that are common to ministry. She tells us about it:



Soon after I became a pastor's wife, I realized that some of the people had expectations of my role based on what the former pastors' wives had done. And they began to drop not-too-subtle hints: "Our former pastor's wife headed Vacation Bible School, another one taught the kids in the junior department, and our last pastor's wife had at least 20 people over for dinner every Sunday night." I felt overwhelmed.

Our children had some identity problems as well. One of them asked, "If Daddy's called 'Pastor,' what should we call *you*?" Then they decided I should be "Mommy Pastor." The stress and pressure intensified, and I felt uncertain of my role. When I shared my concerns with Ross, his response was very reassuring. He said, "Honey, you're the pastor's wife, not the church's wife." That wise statement provided more freedom for me than can be imagined.

Many people assume that pastors meet their church members' needs before they respond to their own family's needs. Living in the glass walls of a parsonage was a constant challenge. I had to learn to balance the needs of church versus family. As our children grew and the church grew, the demands on me increased at home and at church. Ross encouraged me to seek God's wisdom concerning how I would divide my time and responsibilities. He never pressured me to do what was "expected."

Most pastors' wives are expected to attend prayer meeting, but there were many times when I sat at one of the children's ballgames instead. Because I love to play the piano, I enjoyed playing for most of the services—even when we began having three morning services. But it soon became too much for the children to wait through all three services. It was not hard for me to cut back on my schedule.

—Carol Rhoads



Hazel Mabe was not a ministry wife. She was a lady in my home church who taught me and others a lot about preserving proper priorities and doing what our Father asks us to do with the resources with which we are blessed.

No one ever guessed that the quiet little lady who lived so frugally would some day leave more than \$1 million for world evangelism. Hazel Mabe was a quiet, unprepossessing lady who lived quite modestly. Her life demonstrated that her priorities were in divine order. Her faith in God was obvious.

For more than 50 years she drove to church every Sunday in her aging sedan and slipped unobtrusively into a pew near the back. We remember her ready smile and her expression of wide-eyed wonder.

I remember sitting behind Hazel Mabe in church one Sunday morning when I was a little girl. I was totally fascinated by the beauty of the fawn-colored velvet hat that was perched precisely on her head. I was especially intrigued with the colorful feather tucked into its band. Although I should have been listening to the preacher's message, I must confess that I was absorbed with the idea of stroking the soft velvet and smoothing that feathery plume.

Paradoxically, although she was very quiet, there were issues about which Hazel was strongly opinionated. She never

She Can't Even Play the Piano!

hesitated to express her thoughts on certain topics and issues in which she believed. Because of her modesty very few people knew that she had attended Asbury College. She had keen insight and perception, and people listened when she talked.

For several years she taught the Junior Girls' Sunday School class. One of the fondest memories from Shirley, one of "her" girls, was a day trip to Natural Bridge. For many who lived in the church's inner-city neighborhood, it was a special outing that is still remembered.

Although she chose to live in an aging two story brick house on a busy corner, there's no doubt she could have moved out to a quieter, more affluent neighborhood. But she was perfectly content to stay right where she was and drive her old car.

Because, you see, Hazel Mabe had her heart set on property that was out of this world. Her investment strategy was to store up treasures in a place where moths and rust could not destroy them and where thieves could not break in and steal (Matt. 6:20). With that in mind, when she finalized her estate plans she indicated her heart's desire to leave her assets to the church to be used for the expansion of the kingdom. She wanted her faith to be perpetuated throughout the world.

Late Sunday evening, January 30, 1999, Wayne Dunman, stopped by his office on his way home from church. Since his office was across the street from where Hazel lived, he and his wife, Becky, had gotten in the habit of checking on Hazel. When he noticed that her drapes were still open and the lights were burning brightly, he immediately realized that something was wrong. He walked over to her house and knocked on the door. When there was no answer Wayne peeked in the window. To his dismay he saw her sitting slumped in her comfortable old chair. She had passed away.

How fitting to realize that on that Lord's Day Hazel had sat down for a nap and never awakened. It was as though the

Father said, “Come home, dear child. It’s time for you to join your treasures. I have beautiful riches and wealth beyond measure to show you.”

When her will was probated, properties liquidated, and her estate settled, a check in the amount of \$1,214,000.00 was presented to Dr. Louie Bustle in a special service on May 6, 2001. She had stipulated that those funds be used to take the gospel around the world—especially to the poorest of the poor. Because of Hazel’s heavenly investments, countless numbers will hear the gospel.

So many times we are tempted to collect feathers for our caps and garnish our works with grandiose gestures. Through her example Hazel Mabe is still teaching us life lessons. Don’t store up our treasures here. Invest them so that dividends will compound for eternity. Live humbly, stand for what is right, and deposit your assets in the eternal vaults of heaven.

As beautiful and intriguing as that velvety, feathered hat from more than half of a century ago may have been, it is long gone. But on that blustery Sunday afternoon when Hazel closed her eyes for the last time she could have echoed Paul’s words in 2 Tim. 4:6-8, “. . . The time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness.”

Hazel Mabe has received her reward. And it is a crown she will wear forever.

Many times our plans for our lives do not turn out the way we anticipate. Genell Johnson shares how thankful she is today for the riches the Lord has given her:



I was a pastor’s kid who became a pastor’s wife.
That certainly was not something I dreamed of or

She Can't Even Play the Piano!

planned for during high school and early college days. I remember telling my parents that I planned to marry a rich man—or at least a man whose income would be considerably more than my father's. But God had other plans.

During my sophomore year of college, I totally committed my life and future to God, and He cleansed my heart and filled me with His Holy Spirit. Before long, I realized that a certain redheaded religion major was becoming a very significant part of my life. Forget the rich-man plans. I knew what I was destined for—life in the parsonage.

My husband, Talmadge, and I served in the pastorate for 14 years in two very different but equally wonderful churches. Those were eventful, interesting, and blessed years. They were also years of learning that proved to be profitable, although sometimes painful.

If I were to share my experience as a pastor's wife in a neat, three-point summary, I would say something like this:

1. I learned early on that I could not be all things to all people. I tried during that first pastorate. I so wanted to be the perfect pastor's wife. I thought that I had to do all the things that the laypersons couldn't or wouldn't do. I expected more of myself than God did—and maybe more than some of the people. What a releasing discovery to learn one day that God just wanted me to love Him and serve the people by simply loving them!

2. I've always been rather open and expressive. Most of the time, this is a good thing; sometimes it's not so good. It was quite a revelation to learn at one of Florence Littauer's conferences that there is such a thing as a *sanguine* personality. That's me! I also

learned that we sanguines have our very own strengths and weaknesses. I knew through a painful experience involving a good church member-friend to guard my mouth—even in jesting. Words are hard to take back. Furthermore, not everyone is interested in my opinion—however good it might be. I still have to practice caution when it comes to expressing my views. Sometimes it's better to speak my mind at home or not at all.

3. After a few unpleasant and uncomfortable experiences, I finally learned that it's all right to say, "No, but thank you for asking." If you don't have the time or are uncomfortable with the request, it's OK to respectfully decline. I'm thankful that I came to realize my limitations. God has always helped me when I've needed Him to make the difference.

One of my favorite Scripture passages is Prov. 3:5-8, and it's great advice.

I've truly discovered that God is good—*all the time!*

—Genell Johnson



I'm sure all ministry wives would agree that it's essential to make a deliberate and concerted effort to preserve proper priorities. Our pastor's wife, Pam Morgan, shares her philosophy:



Each stage of my life has given me a different schedule with which to deal. Although I did not work full time when our children were young, I was very busy at home as well as supporting our ministry. So I learned to be selective in where I expended my time and energy. My first commitment was to my husband and our children.

She Can't Even Play the Piano!

I learned that the best thing I can do each day is to start out by asking the Lord to order my day so that I can see things from His perspective. That may mean that on some days I simply maintain things at home. On other days I was able to extend my ministry beyond my family. There have been times when I've found that interruptions to my schedule ended up being the most blessed or meaningful times of the day.

As a people-pleaser with the middle-child syndrome, I find myself always wanting to be happy and get along with everyone. So I've found balance in turning to God's Word, because ultimately I'll answer to the Lord. My desire must be to please Him above all else. I've made Ps. 19:14 my life prayer: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer."

—Pam Morgan



That verse would serve all of us well as a prayer for our lives. Even on the days Kay Warren mentioned when we don't have time to shave our legs, our pots and pans have cobwebs, and our bathtub is being used as a planter, we can still pray, *Father, since I can't possibly make everyone happy, I ask You to enable me to establish and sustain priorities that will please You and bring glory to Your name.* I agree with Genell Johnson, who loves Prov. 3:5-6: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." As He answers our prayer and fulfills His promises, He will clarify our priorities and enable us to maintain them daily.

Then maybe your dog will recognize you when you come home!