

## **Pastor's Corner:** 8-11-2019 – Family First

This week I did something that is a bit out of character for me, I put family first. I know that sounds like a terrible admission and to be honest I'm a bit embarrassed. I'm not embarrassed that I chose to prioritize family, but rather that I have a long list of instances when I didn't. If you're anything like me you know how easy it is to let the urgent supplant the important. Sometimes the thing that replaces the important isn't even urgent. Maybe it's just something that you feel responsible for. Maybe it's just misplaced priorities.

All the way back when I was in college my theology professors emphasized the importance of putting your family first. There are countless stories of pastors who let ministry take priority over their family and they paid the price of an unbalanced life. I remember these cautionary tales and I remember thinking to myself, "Not a problem, I'd never do that, Family first!"

I recently realized that I haven't been as good at following that advice as I thought I had been. Last Sabbath I shared with the church elders that my wife had a suspicious finding from her doctor. This finding was suspicious enough that they scheduled a biopsy (probably nothing but possibly something). Amy was going to have the procedure in Texas and I, of course, was in Bismarck. I shared these things with the elders just to ask for prayer and as we talked about it they encouraged me to fly down and be with my wife. Huh, that's an interesting thought.

I have to be honest here and say that I hadn't even considered doing that. I had a full week ahead of me with nominating committee starting, church board, two small groups and a planning meeting for the next semester of groups. When the elders suggested I go down to support her I thought, "yeah sure, like that's gonna happen." Flights out of Bismarck aren't cheap even when you plan ahead, and last minute flights are worse, but just for curiosities sake I decided to check. Sure enough, there were last minute flights available at a price I could afford and all of a sudden the far-fetched seemed like a real possibility.

After the elder's meeting I stepped out to call Amy and tell her that I was thinking of coming down to be with her for the procedure. I was met with stunned silence followed by tears. As we talked about it she told me that she hadn't asked me to come down because she knew it wouldn't be possible. She just assumed (based on past experience) that I would prioritize ministry obligations over her. The fact that I would even consider coming down to support her left her stunned. Ouch.

It was at that point that I realized I hadn't been following my professors' advice all that well over the years. I've missed my daughter's band or choir performances to chair board meetings. I've skipped out on family time for elder's meetings. Birthdays and anniversaries were rescheduled (or skipped) so I could do some church things that I can't even remember anymore.

For years I packed my Sabbaths so full of church activities that I had no time to connect with my family and they were left to fend for themselves on God's holy day. I can remember going to the church every Friday evening for 2 hours of praise practice, getting home at 9:30 or 10 pm only to drag everyone out of the house at 7am to get to the church for another hour of practice before first service which started at 9. Then there would be 4 hours of church followed by an afternoon of potluck, small groups, and visits, and during all that time my wife and daughter were on their own. So yeah, I didn't do a very good job of putting family first.

I'm pretty lucky that I have an understanding family but I'd be lying if I said that my skewed priorities haven't taken a toll. There were events, anniversaries, and birthdays that have passed by without me and I'll never get those times back. And for what? So I could chair another board meeting? So I could referee a nominating committee?

I guess my point in this pastor's corner is to encourage each of us to make sure that we prioritize the important things in life. Our faith, our family, our friends. Those are the things that matter. They are the things that should be our priorities. Don't let things like work or hobbies or even church obligations squeeze out the things that really matter.

This week I made a choice to prioritize the most important person in my life, and I'm glad I did. The church has been extremely supportive which is just great. We canceled the board meeting, the nominating committee met without me (as did one small group and the group planning meeting). The things that normally would have held me back carried on just fine without me. As a result, I was able to be with my wife during a difficult time and, for once, I was able to show her that she is a priority to me.

I want to thank the elders and church for their support and encouragement to be present for my family. There's a good chance that the suspicious finding is harmless but there's always that chance that it's not. We appreciate your prayers. I would also encourage each of you to take time to assess your priorities. Are you putting the most important things first? If not, what needs to change to make that happen? What can you do to keep the first things first?

Happy Sabbath  
Pastor Tyler