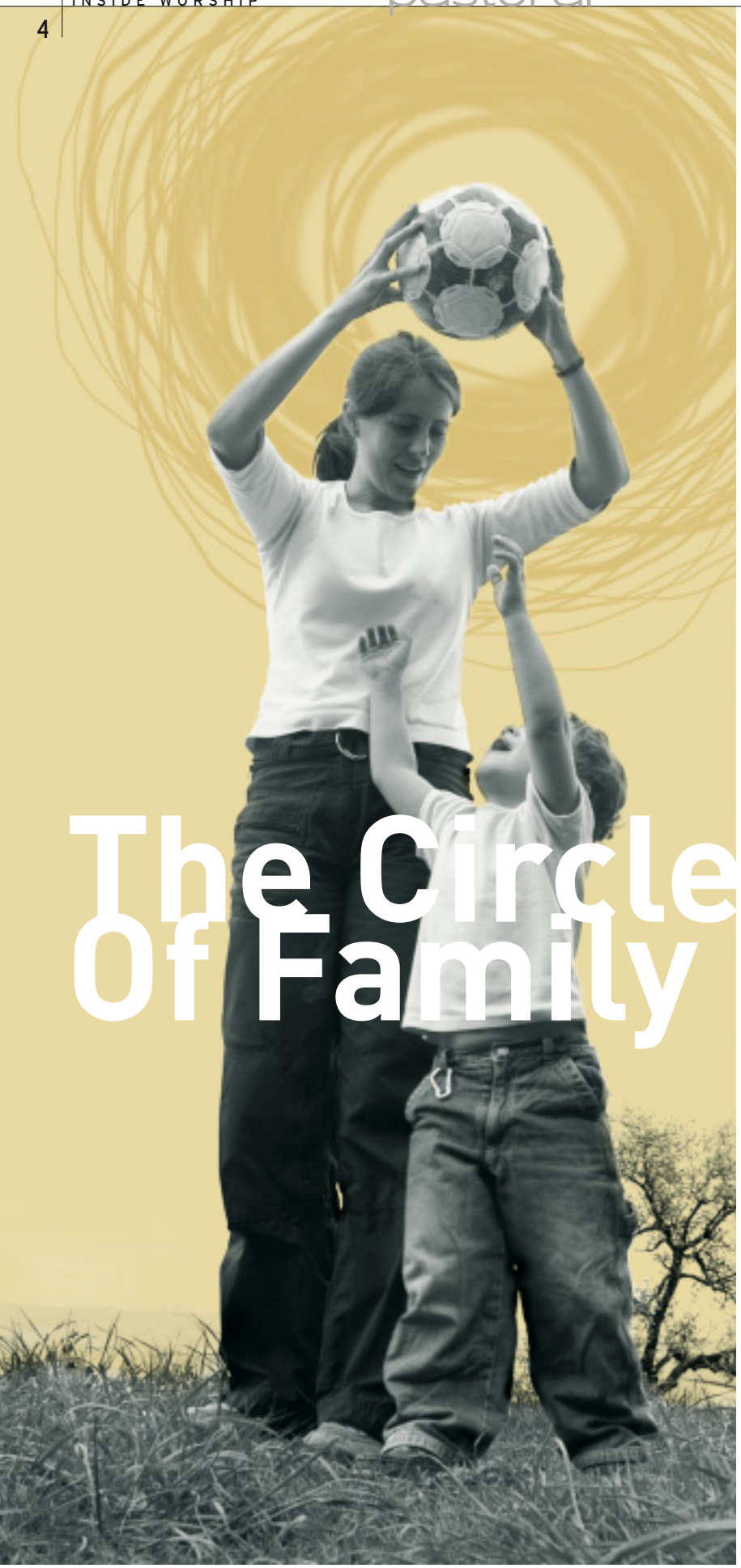


The Circle Of Family

Judy Davids has ministered to leaders and their families for decades. She leads Pastor's Sabbath Retreats for pastoral families across the US, and her insights into the unique pressures that leaders face have been forged through years of counseling experience.

You've seen many families in which one or both of the spouses were in ministry leadership. What is the general state of affairs you see? Are leader's marriages and family lives healthy?

Many leadership marriages and family lives that I encounter are unhealthy (I would say 95% of those I meet). This may sound extreme, perhaps because the ones who come to me as a counselor are the unhealthy ones. What we do know, statistically, is that 50% of pastors/planters burn-out within the first five years. The reasons are varied:

- Pastoring people is a high-pressure job.
- Pastoral personalities tend to be driven, Type-A personalities that are prone to work addiction and personal burn-out/depression.
- Our consumer, fast-paced culture, permeated by TV, is working against the preservation of marriage/family.
- There is a lack of prayer. The average pastor prays personally for six minutes per week. Taking a personal / contemplative retreat is highly unusual for a pastor.
- There is a "consumer market" culture in our churches that focuses on performance, bottom-line numbers and money. This replaces a Kingdom of God culture, where love is the regal rule and the ethos is emotionally safe wherein a pastor and his/her family can thrive.

What are some of the common strengths/weaknesses you see in leaders' marriages and families?

In terms of strengths, the postmodern young pastors of today are emphasizing relationships more than ever, and thus their ministry tends to be more relational. There is an interest in storytelling, which catches and holds the attention of congregations – and assists us in integrating our stories into His Greater Story.

In terms of weaknesses, there seems to be less perseverance, less self-control and less personal discipline in our leaders, all of which are characteristic of what Edwin Friedman calls our "regressive" culture. There seems to be less old-fashioned faithfulness in church leaders. I think of our Savior's words: "Well done my good and faithful servant" (Matt 25: 21). Today, pastors and missionaries are giving up on marriages, on family life and on ministry, in disillusionment, more quickly than years past. Perhaps this is because there now are other options rather than simply "sticking it out."

Our narcissistic culture, focusing on a reactive, "me first" attitude, rather than a differentiated "here I stand, but I will continue to care about you" attitude, is contributing to the breakdown of relationships. This can leave one feeling completely alone and unsupported in the middle of many superficial "friends."

What counsel would you give to leaders who find their lives spinning out of control?

There are six ingredients of a healthy lifestyle which helped me to return from burn-out 15 years ago, and to begin to minister with a bead on long-term service – and finishing well over the long haul.

Emphasize your relationships

1. Abide In The Vine

In John 15:1-8, we are given a personal invitation to abide deeply with him: *"Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit."* Meditate on the following Scriptures: Hebrews 3:1-6; 12:1-2; James 1:5-8; and Hebrews 12: 5-13. We are thus submitting to Jesus' pruning and discipline, and making him central to everything in our lives.

There is an order to ministry: communion, community and (only then) ministry. This is Henri Nouwen's way of saying that one must minister out of relationship, which brings support and love with it. If we forget the communion aspect, we are on our way towards trouble.

2. Practice Sabbath Rhythm

Sabbath rhythm means putting space into your life to *pause, pray and play.* That is, our lives should have the rhythm: "Work, work, work, work, work, work, REST!" Rest means placing rest and renewing relationships above our work. What does having a "rule of rest" do for us? It teaches us how to stop work and say "No!" It combats spiritual dryness. A rule of rest makes it easier to stop and be still to pray every day – for we are practiced from the weekly rhythm. Last but not least, a rule of rest refreshes us.

3. Practice Spiritual Disciplines

More than rules, *practicing the spiritual disciplines* is like nurturing a love affair. Practicing the spiritual disciplines is placing ourselves in the presence of our Beloved. We do them because of our weakness. We do them because Jesus needed them. We do them to reach our goals, particularly our goal of submission to the kingdom rule of God in a context of intimacy with him.

4. Take A Personal Retreat

One can do this by (a) going away, (i.e. stopping your daily routine and taking time to hang out with God), (b) getting needed rest (resting is spiritual!) and (c) harvesting your journals (i.e. go back and reread and reflect upon them). Such a retreat will help you to gain a new perspective on your life.

5. Keep A Reflective Journal

This will enrich, nourish, mature, heal, develop, broaden, enhance and transform you. In your journal, (a) write about your feelings, (b) write for yourself, not to share with others, (c) be honest, for it is only you and God, and (d) once yearly harvest your journal (as described above). As you write your story, the mystery of the incarnation happens – Jesus is revealed as the Word of God through you, and your story in His Greater Story.

6. Prevent Burn-Out

Burn-out is the running out of steam physically, emotionally, and spiritually – causing our lives to grind to a halt. It is a systemic exhaustion depression. The warning signs are a decreasing ability to function or perform, detachment or withdrawal from people, excessive and chronic fatigue, depleted motivation ("I don't feel like doing anything"), increased impatience and irritability, feelings of being unappreciated, negative changes in work habits and relationships, disorientation and confusion, an inability to concentrate, and physical complaints (headaches, backaches, stomach problems).

Change your lifestyle

To prevent burn-out, all three dimensions of the human being: body, mind/emotions, and spirit, must be addressed. Get proper exercise, eat a healthy diet and get adequate sleep. Express feelings appropriately (i.e. don't bottle them up – journal or share with a friend instead), place a Sabbath rhythm in your lifestyle and take a spiritual retreat, put laughing, comedy, humor, play, regular celebrations, and hobbies into your life. Choose tasks well – know your limits, be assertive and say "no" without guilt to tasks God has not given you. Have a "dumping place," and set up an intercessory group to pray especially for you. Make a good friend who will call you out to play, or shatter your religiosity regularly. Finally, develop an attitude of humility and of gratitude in all you do.

To promote good mental health, thus preventing burn-out, we need at least four of the following seven support systems in place in our lives: *a spouse, an extended blood family, a pastor/church family, a peer friend, a small group, a spiritual director and a counselor.*

My personal daily schedule includes: journaling, reading Scripture, praying, reading a spiritual classic, having breakfast with my husband, aerobic exercise, and showering and dressing for my day. It also includes reading and praying with my husband for 15 minutes at bedtime. My weekly schedule includes: one day off, with nothing to do but relax and refresh myself. My quarterly schedule includes: a two-day personal retreat. My yearly schedule includes: a family vacation, a weekend marriage retreat with my spouse, and a personal one week fasting retreat at a nearby Catholic retreat house.

These are a few tips how to change your lifestyle to effectively minister as a family. I have learned the above the hard way by burning out and having to take an entire year out of counseling and ministry. You do not have to repeat my mistakes, but hopefully, you can learn from them.

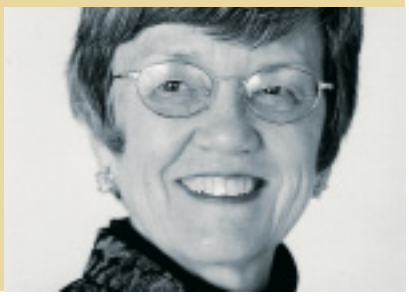
Helpful Family Resources:

When Couples Pray Together by David and Jan Stoop (a good book to help begin the "praying-regularly-with-spouse" tradition),

The Seven Principles For Making Marriage Work by John M. Gottman (for help with a struggling marriage relationship), and

Sabbath, Finding Rest, Renewal, And Delight In Our Busy Lives by Wayne Muller.

An ordained Vineyard pastor, Judy Davids is a wife, mother and grandmother. She has ministered with the Vineyard (and other groups) in the US, Canada, Europe, Russia, and Africa, including 6 years of co-pastoring a church with her husband. A registered clinical counselor, she has initiated lay counseling programs in four different countries. She presently lives in Meadows Place, Texas, where she is on the staff of the Sugar Land Vineyard, leading its Community Care Ministries and directing the Pastors' Sabbath Retreats for Vineyard USA.



Burn-out is a systemic exhaustion depression