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#### BOOK REVIEW

Croft, Brian, and Cara Croft. *The Pastor's Family: Shepherding Your Family through the Challenges of Pastoral Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013. 171 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-0-310-49509-3.

Brian Croft, senior pastor of Auburndale Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, is the founder of Practical Shepherding, a nonprofit organization committed to equipping pastors in the practical matters of pastoral ministry. He has been serving in pastoral ministry for almost twenty years. Cara Croft, co-author of this book, is Brian's wife and serves in a number of ways by teaching and discipling the women of Auburndale Baptist Church. Brian Croft is the main author and Cara Croft has written Chapter 7, the Afterword, and Appendix 1.

Why do so many pastors struggle to balance the call to faithfully shepherd the church with the call to care for their wives and children? The authors attempt to answer this pastoral and practical question solely from the perspective of male pastors. They conclude that the cause of the struggle is the sinful tendency of pastors who prioritize the church over the family and that it is possible for pastors to find a balance between these two holy duties by undertaking two practices: repentance of the tendency embedded in sinful nature, and being more attentive to the priority of shepherding their families while faithfully serving the church.

The authors develop this book in three parts. The introduction and the first part discuss the root of the problem theoretically and propose a solution in a biblical, pastoral, and spiritual perspective. The second and third parts provide the reader with several practical ministry strategies for shepherding the pastor's family.

A major pastoral issue the authors deal with is how to

prioritize between the demands of ministry and the demands of being a father and husband as a pastor. Brian Croft points out that the traditional definition of “faithfulness and greatness of ministry” has been couched in terms of “how many people were converted,” or “the insightfulness of works,” criteria the world would use. In this traditional view, Brian Croft argues, the care of the family and marriage has been placed under “the category of plain and servantlike grunt work” (23), and the demands of ministry always take priority over the demands of family and marriage. Brian identifies six competing and tempting demands of ministry: approval, appearance, success, significance, expectations, and friendships. The temptation to follow these demands as the first priority, he argues, will eventually “deceive” pastors into making decisions that will negatively affect their families by sacrificing their wives and children. Therefore, families of the pastor are unnoticed and sacrificed when we rate faithfulness and greatness in ministry.

Criticizing the traditional way as a worldly way, however, Brian Croft insists that the greatness and faithfulness of ministry should not only be rated by the perceived success or popularity of a pastor’s ministry but also by a pastor’s faithfulness to serve his family and marriage. Thus, he finds the root of the problem in the way a pastor and his wife choose to respond to the competing demands of ministry and family. It is, Croft observes, their tendency to prioritize the demands of ministry over the demands of family that is disobedience to Scripture and dishonoring to God. It is a sin that originates from “sinful desire” (45). Therefore, the solution the Crofts offer is biblical and spiritual: repent of his (their) sin against God and the family, and remember and keep some biblical principles designed for the family by God. Pastors must avoid the temptation to sacrifice their wives and children for the demands of ministry and pay more attention to the priority of shepherding the pastor’s family while serving the church.

The second and third parts detail two practical challenges pastors confront while shepherding their families: shepherding the wife and shepherding the children. The first concerns the challenges that pastors’ wives experience while they are serving

the church. Cara Croft refers to ten challenges such as unrealistic expectations, loneliness, being overlooked, and so on. Cara's encouragement to the wife of the pastor is that knowing the joy and privilege "in sharing in the hardships of ministry" (90) will help overcome those challenges. Looking to Peter's instruction to Christian husbands (1 Pet 3:7) for a biblical solution, Brian Croft offers four practical and pastoral ways to care for pastors' wives: serving, encouraging, discipling, and praying for them.

The other practical issue is about shepherding the pastor's children. Here the authors go directly to offer two ways of caring for the pastor's children without diagnosing struggles or difficulties that pastor's children may experience. First, the parents must take care of the children individually within a deliberate discipleship structure for the purpose of their spiritual growth. The authors believe that such an individual discipleship structure will help pastors prioritize the spiritual growth of their children and build a healthy relationship with them. Second, they suggest five principles that are useful in teaching children the work of pastoral ministry. The authors insist that these principles will help the children grow to understand the ministry and the local church that their father serves. In addition to these two practices, Brian Croft encourages the pastor to have regular family worship under the leadership of the father. As final advice he refers to four warning signs of neglectful patterns in the pastor's family and marriage and suggests five practical tips to prevent family and marriage neglect.

The most valuable aspect of this book is that it embodies a hopeful and realistic paradigm of ministry for pastors who are struggling with family and marriage while serving the church in the postmodern society where dysfunctional families have been a major social and cultural issue. Starting from candid experiences, the authors identify the current yet hidden issues and offer pastoral practices for pastors. Pointing out the importance of being a father and a husband as a pastor, this book proposes that the functional role of the ministry leader should be attentive to familial roles. This book provides a biblically hopeful ministry model in the postmodern culture because it attempts to find principles of ministry in the Scripture, for instance, as the authors find the

root of the problem in a sinful nature that could be overcome through repentance. Furthermore, the practical and pastoral principles suggested in the book are realistic because the authors present the applications of principles in detail for ministering to pastors' wives and children from their almost twenty-year-ministry experience.

Despite this positive evaluation, two weaknesses of this book deserve mentioning. The first is its limited focus on male pastors. Although one could take up the themes from a gender neutral perspective using the terms "ministry leaders," "spouses," and "parents" as the operative terms, it is likely that female pastors would experience the issues differently in many areas. Many Christian seminaries today have as many women students as men, and a number of female pastors are called to serve the church as senior pastors. They would have difficulties in dealing with both ministry and family, but their perspective is ignored. The contribution from Cara Croft represents a female perspective, yet only as a pastor's wife, not a female pastor. This book would have a wider appeal if it included chapters or a section in every chapter written by female pastors who are experiencing similar difficulties in ministry. It would help the focus of the book to offer counsel to both men and women in ministry for taking care of their responsibilities as spouses and parents.

Another weakness is the insufficient biblical and theological examination of the topic. Defining the tendency to prioritize ministry over family as disobedience to the Scriptures that mandate a pastor to care for his family, Brian Croft goes on to insist that such a tendency originates from pastors' "sinful desire" (45, 49). Most biblical passages he refers to, however, seem irrelevant for his argument because they do not directly discuss the tension between ministry and family; rather they simply describe the relationship between husband and wife with their children. In addition, referring to John Wesley, George Whitefield, and William Carey as examples of failure in ministry may not seem reasonable to most pastors. More rigorous and considered biblical and theological examination would help readers agree with the authors.

Weaving biblical, spiritual, and pastoral perspectives

together, the authors have described a common problem and some solutions in the practice of pastoral ministry. This volume could be very useful to pastors seeking the balance between ministry and family. It is a suitable supplementary textbook of ministry for those who are recently called to or are preparing for pastoral ministry and for pastors who are struggling with marriage and family while serving the church.

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