

Help! My Kids Aren't on Board With Ministry

It's a terrible feeling to invest yourself in something you're confident you were made to do and called to do but that your family resents. It tears us apart when parenting well feels like it opposes pastoring well. So, what are we to do when our children are opposed to our ministry?

1. Remember your family is your primary ministry

You are a parent first and a pastor second. God has given you stewardship of the lives of your children. They are His kids, and you have the privilege of loving them, pouring into them, disciplining them, and raising them to be faithful representatives of Jesus. Your family is your first responsibility. That doesn't mean you're beholden to their every whim and wish, but you cannot callously overlook or ignore them either.

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2. Remember you are called to lead your family

God didn't give you a family to jerk you around and to dictate every direction your life takes. He didn't call you to follow every mood and preference your children have. He gave you family to lead, and leadership is costly. It requires making decisions for the good of all, not the enjoyment of all.

As one former boss of mine would say, "If you want everyone to like you, go sell ice cream." (And frankly, even that would make some folks mad because they wouldn't like the prices or the selection). This means you're called to cast the vision for what kind of family you want to be, where you're going as a family, how you'll enjoy Jesus together, and how you'll serve Jesus together. This includes making clear and compelling the reasons why the local church will be central in your family's life, as part of God's design.

3. Acknowledge that ministry is hard on kids and costly to families

Be realistic. Pastoral ministry comes at a cost to the family in time, emotional expenditure, exposure, and many other ways. Talk with your kids about this. Acknowledge their discomforts and frustrations and admit yours (with appropriate consideration of circumstance, your kids' maturity, etc.). Don't hold your kids to a standard that's higher than what any other faithful Christian should live by in terms of patience, forgiveness, prayer, and dependence on Jesus. They need a context to be honest and to be humbly heard and cared for.

4. Consider the stage your kids are in and the cost of ministry for them

There's no hard and fast age bracket breakdown to say, "Respond just so when your kids are in this age range, and make these adjustments when they hit this age." But wisdom and the memory of our own younger days tells us different stages of childhood and adolescence come with different challenges. And some kids are burdened with particular struggles—mental health, physical ailments, illness, spiritual crises, etc. You must pay attention to these things and consider how your role in ministry is affecting them for good, ill, or otherwise.

In general, younger kids will oppose ministry less than older kids, if for no other reason than they lack self-awareness and awareness of its challenges. And older kids might resist ministry stridently, but for reasons that require discipleship rather than reconsideration of your call. But you will only know this by taking stock of the whole picture of age, stage, and individual needs.

5. Take your kids' challenges to your fellow leaders for prayer and care

I write this with one assumption and one qualification. The assumption is you have fellow leaders (pastors/elders). And the

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qualification is they are men you trust with the vulnerabilities of life. You need fellow leaders who care for your kids deeply and want their best, men who will seek to protect them and their well-being. You are not tattling on your kids. You're not making a report. You are asking brothers for prayer and counsel. You are giving them a chance to be in your court, to ease your burdens, and maybe to suggest some changes in ministry to ease the burden on your family.

6. Consider your home and family dynamics

This is a diplomatic way of saying, "Look in the mirror." Is there anything in the relational patterns and culture of your home that exacerbates the pressures of ministry on your kids? Is it a tense home, a contentious home, or an emotionally muted and shut down home? Are there matters your family needs to address through pastoral or professional counseling in order to better support one another and engage the work of ministry?

7. Consider your church's relational and cultural dynamics

What are the expectations on your family from the church? If you can't name them, that's a problem. If you would name different ones than your wife or kids would, that's another, maybe larger, problem. Do your kids feel like they're walking into a warm, welcoming environment at church or something else altogether?

If, as you consider all this, you begin to recognize cultural problems within the church that are burdening your family, you are then faced with the difficult question of how to respond. But you must respond. Will you boldly address the problems, quietly seek to adjust them over time, acquiesce to the prevailing culture at the expense of your family, or will you leave?

8. Find outlets for relief

You and your family need outlets to relieve the pressures and disappointments of ministry when they come. You need Sabbath days away from ministry weekly, and you need vacations annually. It doesn't need to be lavish or expensive, but it does need to be away. You likely need a sabbatical rhythm, especially if you have been in ministry for any length of time.

These are rest rhythms to restore mind and heart. But you may need care rhythms too, such as counseling and invested friendships with people outside your church. Very simply, if your child is deeply struggling with your ministry, their world cannot be wrapped up in the life of your church.

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9. Consider stepping away from ministry

You're a parent before you're a pastor. If staying in the ministry is destroying the soul of your child, quit. If all conversations and counseling and rest rhythms and prayer is not relieving the burden on your child, quit. Maybe it's a temporary leave, or maybe it's a career change. But either way, it's an announcement to your child that you love them and that the well-being of their soul doesn't depend on your success in ministry.

This might be a heartbreaking decision or a relieving one, and it certainly isn't one to take lightly. But if you step away from the ministry for the good of your kids, you are potentially showing them something of the loving character of their heavenly Father they otherwise might never have been able to see.

From Barnabas Piper

(<https://research.lifeway.com/2025/03/12/help-my-kids-arent-on-board-with-ministry/>)
