

1983

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Recommended Citation

Hindson, Edward and Dobson, Ed, "Why Preachers' Kids Go Bad" (1983). *Faculty Publications and Presentations*. Paper 140.
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FUNDAMENTALISM TODAY



Why Preachers' Kids Go Bad

by Ed Dobson and Ed Hindson

He was the pastor of a prominent Independent Baptist church. As we sat in his car in front of the church one spring afternoon, he reminisced over his 17 years as pastor there. The church had grown from less than 100 to over 1,400 in regular attendance. They had just moved into new multimillion-dollar facilities, and the church had just given him the parsonage as a gift in appreciation for his years of service. Spiritually and financially, this church was on a stable foundation. The pastor's enthusiasm was contagious as he elaborated on the many blessings and victories of his fruitful ministry. By all external criteria, he was entering his fifties as a highly successful minister.

Yet as we talked, his enthusiasm turned to regret. Beyond the external evidences of success, we discovered a broken man who would trade all the trappings of his large church for an opportunity to live his life over. In spite of the fact that he had helped hundreds of people, his own children, now grown and married, had wandered far from God.

Others can make mistakes and the mistakes are always forgiven. But when the pastor's children make mistakes they are sometimes forgiven but seldom forgotten.

This true story could be repeated hundreds of times over. It causes one to seriously consider the question, "Why do preachers' kids go bad?" The causes can be divided into three major areas: pressures on pastors' children, their home environment, and their free choice.

Pressures on Preachers' Children

Pastors' children live in a glass-house environment. They are watched at church, at school, and in the community. This constant pressure can produce strong resistance against the ministry. The pressure is experienced in several dimensions:

The pressure of perfection. Although people would deny it,

there is unconscious pressure from most for the pastor's children to perform close to perfection. Others can make mistakes and the mistakes are *always* forgiven. But when the pastor's children make mistakes they are *sometimes* forgiven but seldom forgotten. Somehow they are denied the right to be normal. There is a tendency for the children to resent this "perfection mentality" and to overreact by doing worse things than anyone else in the church. The converse is also true. Preachers' children think that others expect them to have poor manners and they subconsciously live up to it.

The pressure of preaching. This is a pressure commonly applied to the pastor's son. Many well-meaning saints ask him, "Are you going to be a preacher like your daddy when you grow up?" After being bombarded with this question for years, the son rebels against it and in many cases rebels against the ministry altogether.

The pressure of possessions. Since most pastors live on a stringent budget, there is little room for large allowances for the children. If other children have cars, name-brand clothes, and meals in fine restaurants, there is strong pressure on the pastor's children to live on the same socioeconomic level. When the parents cannot afford to maintain that level, the children begin to resent what they perceive as the lower status of the ministry. They may even feel rejected by their peers.

The pressure of peers. The pressure on teenagers to conform to their peers is overwhelming. This pressure is even greater on the children of ministers because of their desire to be accepted for what they are and not for what their fathers are. That desire is so strong that they will go the extra mile to prove they belong. For example, if a group of teenagers is driving around and one suggests drinking beer, the "p.k." may offer to buy the beer and drink more than anyone else.

These pressures are real and cannot be dismissed in considering why preachers' kids rebel. Since the pressure to rebel is so strong, careful consideration must be given to compensate. The pressure must be overcome by providing a strong, loving, and consistent home environment. The future direction of pastors' children is *not* determined by the pressures around them but by the qualities and care of their homes.

Home Environment

When one counsels with pastors' children who are going through serious spiritual struggles, it becomes apparent that

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there is a specific void in many of their homes. Having talked to hundreds of such teenagers, we have repeatedly heard several statements identifying key qualities that are missing in many homes.

"My dad has time for the church but little time for me." This is the most common complaint of pastors' children. They emphasize that their fathers are highly committed to the church

Often what they do in the home contradicts what they preach in the pulpit. Kids know whether Dad prays and reads the Bible every day. They know if he watches questionable television programs and laughs at off-color jokes. They know if he is really consistent. When there is disparity between the pulpit and the home, the children become disillusioned and frequently rebel.

Personal Choice

Some Bible expositors and family counselors are quick to state that if you train a child properly, that child will not depart from these teachings. We have already emphasized the importance of the home in compensating for the pressures on pastors' children. However, there are some cases where the parents have provided a stable home and loved their children, yet the children did rebel against the church. Sometimes, even when parents do the best they can, a child will still make wrong choices because he is a human being with a free will. If Adam and Eve sinned in a perfect environment, it is logical to assume that preachers' children can make mistakes in a good environment.

There are many instances where one child turned out well and another rebelled, yet they were products of the same home environment. When this occurs, the parents must trust that individual to the Lord and pray him through the difficult situations. Church people should not pass self-righteous judgment on him or his parents, but love him back to Christ.

There are three major factors that contribute to the rebellion of pastors' kids: the pressures they experience, their home environment, and their ability to choose. Most of the problems can be avoided by establishing the right kind of home environment. Preachers' children can survive the pressures of their unique position. Don't let a ministry (your church) crowd out the ministry (your family). □

Pastors' children need love, and unless their fathers express that love on a regular basis, the children will be deprived of a vital ingredient for their personal development.

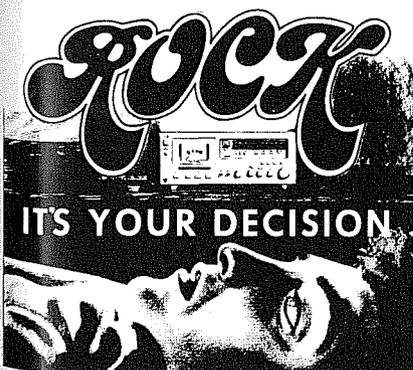
but rarely spend time with them. They don't play ball, games, or take the children places. They don't attend athletic events and musical competitions where their children are performing.

"My dad never listens to me." Some kids complain that their dads do not listen to their problems while others feel that "Dad's mind is already made up, so there is no use talking to him anyway." In either case there is little communication apart from the orders that are passed down to the children.

"My dad doesn't love me." When we first heard pastors' kids tell us that their dads did not love them and that they in turn hated their dads, it was shocking. But in many cases their dads had never told them, "I love you." Pastors' children need love, and unless their fathers express that love on a regular basis, the children will be deprived of a vital ingredient for their personal development.

"My dad preaches one thing, but does another." The pastors' children see their dads out of the pulpit living in the home.

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Rock music has invaded the lives of modern youth, even in the church. This is the story of a typical church youth group and particularly of 17 year old Jeff. Because of his addiction to this music, his mother talks with the youth pastor. The youth pastor, himself a member of a rock group before he was saved, talks with Jeff and challenges him not to listen to rock music for two weeks, during which time he should learn all he can about the people involved in rock, discovering their philosophy and life style.

Jeff took the challenge! Withdrawal pain and peer pressure were extreme agony!

But he stayed with it and at the end of the two weeks presented his shocking findings to the youth group.

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