

“Too often, the pastor’s family lives with weighty and unarticulated open secrets. Dad has been called—summoned by God and confirmed by the congregation—to undershepherd a flock of sheep (and wolves), while the pastor’s wife and children live under expectations shared by no other family in the church. PKs are born into a burden and a blessing that they did not choose but in God’s providence was chosen for them. And under the spotlight, they confront the world, the flesh, and the devil. This excellent and balanced volume gives biblical words, categories, and concepts to these real burdens. Every chapter in this book is worth its weight. And every chapter unearths an important truth—when God calls a man to the office of teaching elder (pastor), He intends a blessing for each member of his family. God never overlooks the obedience of children. While that blessing may have sharp edges and lonely days, under the light of the gospel and the love of God, it bears fruit for the child, the church, and the world.

—Rosaria Butterfield, wife of Kent Butterfield, pastor of the First Reformed Presbyterian Church of Durham, North Carolina; and homeschooling mother and grandmother

“Catherine Stewart, who edited the helpful book *Letters to Pastors’ Wives*, has assembled another timely volume with an impressive list of contributors called *Surviving the Fishbowl: Letters to Pastors’ Kids*. Every pastoral family will resonate with the topics covered and find wisdom and encouragement for facing the challenges that children encounter in the course of ministry life.”

—Ligon Duncan, chancellor and CEO, Reformed Theological Seminary

“The latest collection from Catherine Stewart is another gem. How I wish I had this volume while our three PKs were growing up. Not to worry: now this resource should be on every gift list for every pastor’s home. It is practical, biblical, and lively and features a faculty of wise and experienced parents. Having known many of the children discussed in this book and their parents, who write unique epistles to pastors’ kids, I find that this fine and timely book oozes authenticity. If you love your pastor, share this book with his children!”

—David Hall, senior pastor, Midway Presbyterian Church (PCA), Powder Springs, Georgia

“I’m not sure I’ve seen a book quite like this one, and it’s curious why that is so. Pastors’ kids are certainly in a fishbowl, and these letters covering every imaginable issue are the perfect antidote for both parents and children. Cleverly conceived and disarmingly candid, this book is sure to do a great deal of good. I nominate it as book of the year!”

—Derek W. H. Thomas, senior minister, First Presbyterian Church,
Columbia, South Carolina; chancellor’s professor, Reformed
Theological Seminary; and teaching fellow, Ligonier Ministries

SURVIVING THE FISHBOWL

SURVIVING THE FISHBOWL

LETTERS TO PASTORS' KIDS

Edited by
Catherine Stewart



Reformation Heritage Books
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Surviving the Fishbowl

© 2021 by Catherine Stewart

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. Direct your requests to the publisher at the following addresses:

Reformation Heritage Books

2965 Leonard St. NE

Grand Rapids, MI 49525

616-977-0889

orders@heritagebooks.org

www.heritagebooks.org

The views expressed in this book are entirely those of the individual writer and do not represent the opinions or convictions of the other contributors.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible, which is in the public domain.

Printed in the United States of America

21 22 23 24 25 26/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Stewart, Catherine J., 1974- editor.

Title: *Surviving the fishbowl : letters to pastors' kids* / edited by Catherine Stewart.

Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Reformation Heritage Books, [2021]

Identifiers: LCCN 2020052546 (print) | LCCN 2020052547 (ebook) | ISBN 9781601788344 (paperback) | ISBN 9781601788351 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Children of clergy.

Classification: LCC BV4396 .S88 2021 (print) | LCC BV4396 (ebook) | DDC 248.8/2—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020052546>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020052547>

For additional Reformed literature, request a free book list from Reformation Heritage Books at the above regular or email address.

**Hannah, Benjamin, Eleah Marie, Josiah,
Samuel, and Eliza Kate,**

*For you we prayed. For you we labored. For you we give thanks.
Given the chance, you might not have chosen the life of a pastor's kid,
but when God chose it for you, He enriched our lives beyond measure.
May He dog your steps with mercy and kindness always. Press on!*

—Catherine Stewart, editor

CONTENTS

Foreword	ix
----------------	----

PART 1: Laying the Foundation

1. Identity Crisis: PK or Child of the King?	3
2. Expectations: Who Sets the Standard?	15
3. Count Your Blessings: Enjoying the Benefits of Being a PK	25
4. Friendships: The Glorious Gift of Extended Family.....	37
5. Loving the Church: Pressing On Through Family Highs and Lows	49

PART 2: Sharks in the Bowl

6. Criticism: The Godly Response	65
7. Loneliness: Friendship in Solitary Seasons.	75
8. Cultural Change: Adapting to New Surroundings	87
9. Depression: The Dark Night of the Soul.	99
10. Rebel PK: The One Who Got Away (Almost)	117
11. Financial Crisis: High Calling with a High Price	133
Afterword	145

FOREWORD

Compelled by the testimony of Scripture, we must insist that a call to pastoral ministry rests only upon the man whom God has equipped and qualified for the work of the gospel. Yet we must also confess, in light of the unavoidable evidence of personal experience, that the implications of that call reach well beyond him, sweeping his wife and children along with it.

Their lives are so intimately intertwined with his that his ministry joys and sorrows, his pastoral trials and triumphs are, at least in some measure, theirs as well. With him they get to see, from a uniquely privileged vantage point, the many ways in which the Spirit of Christ is busy transforming human lives as the Word of God is proclaimed. Knowing Dad as they do, our children see the faded glory of a fallen man made in God's image, redeemed by Jesus Christ, and called to preach the gospel. They live in close proximity to his gifts and graces. With his besetting sins and fleshly liabilities, they are all too familiar. And so when the Lord uses us, all our liabilities notwithstanding, our children are being shown the grace of God deploying an often ignoble and weak thing (1 Cor. 1:26 and the verses following) in the accomplishment of His glorious design. There is an opportunity afforded to pastors' children to understand that, while "Dad" ought never to be set upon a pedestal, yet, despite his many failings, even he can be God's instrument for good. A pastor can be a living demonstration of the power of God to His children, encouraging them never to rule themselves beyond the reach of grace, nor to exclude themselves from the possibility of usefulness in

Christian service. I want my boys to conclude, as they enter into manhood, “If God used *my* dad, he can certainly use *me*.”

So, the children of a minister have a privileged access to the life of a man whom God has called to the ministry of the Word and prayer. And yet, with this privilege come many temptations. Unreasonable expectations from congregants (or even from Mom and Dad) can drive a pastor’s child to rebel or to become a practiced Pharisee. A carefully cultivated air of churchy moralism, tintured with all the right vocabulary and a meekly compliant spirit, easily becomes a strategy to keep the judgments of others at bay. Disillusionment with the church, with whom a needy teenager must compete for her father’s attention and time, can slowly slide into disillusionment with the gospel itself. Dad’s hypocrisy cannot be hidden from his children when he says one thing in the pulpit but does another at home. His short temper under stress, his prayerlessness, his readiness to respond to the pastoral needs of the flock while missing the hurting hearts of his own household—these describe the minefield of a pastor’s family life.

And with these temptations come many weighty responsibilities. Pastors’ children see and hear much more than most church members ever will, and their ability to cope with the infidelities and fault lines that run through every church is too often assumed but rarely cultivated. Where the pastor is faithful at home, the duty of his children to believe the gospel and live for Christ is heightened beyond that of other children. Pastors’ children have greater privileges than most of those among whom their father serves. After all, they can ask questions any time. They see close up how the gospel is at work in their father’s life. They may often overhear his prayers for the spiritual welfare of his flock. They will see him pour himself out day and night to bless and not to burden them. They will see how his passion in the pulpit really is a reflection of his heartfelt passion for his people all the week long. And so, the responsibility to “improve” those privileges weighs heavily upon a pastor’s child. “Everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required” (Luke 12:48).

Yet all this notwithstanding, it’s hard to find resources that offer real help. How shall a pastor’s child navigate the failures of his pastor/father alongside the failures of the church his father pastors? When

our instinct as sinners is usually to blame others (“The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate” Gen. 3:12), how can we lead ministry children to see the sin festering in their own hearts when, as a matter of fact, the church often does bear at least some of the responsibility for their fathers’ overwork and lack of availability? How can we help pastors’ children believe and delight in the gospel and want to devote themselves to its advancement with zeal and urgency when in the apparent service of the gospel Dad is burning out? Certainly some of the solution must be to cultivate healthy pastors who are faithful fathers and loving husbands, who have inviolable boundaries that a church cannot transgress.

But no pastor gets the work/life balance right all the time. And for those difficult times a tool kit is needed to equip a minister’s child to understand and integrate their father’s weaknesses, the church’s needs, their own sin and need of a savior, and the hope of the gospel. When a ministry child is raised in an environment of constant sacrifice, financial hardship, cultural dissonance, and unreasonable expectations, a clear view of the surpassing worth of Jesus Christ will be invaluable. We want our children to say, through tears perhaps, as they sacrifice along with the rest of the family, “Jesus is worth it! His gospel is worth it! The good of the church is worth it!” We want our children to join us on Christ’s mission, with the same intrepid cheerfulness we ourselves must cultivate.

The aim of this volume is to provide many of the tools a pastor’s child will need. But pastors and pastors’ wives need to read it, too. Here are insights from seasoned preachers who have given years to the gospel ministry, from PKs who have wandered away but have come home to Christ in the end, from moms and dads who love their children and want them to thrive and want to help our children thrive, too. May the Lord use it to comfort troubled young hearts and direct them heavenward. May He use it to counsel troubled parents as they care for their ministry children. And above all, may Christ be magnified!

—David Strain

PART 1

LAYING THE FOUNDATION



IDENTITY CRISIS

PK or Child of the King?

Jasmine (Baucham) Holmes

Being a pastor presents myriad challenges. There are long days, late nights, unexpected complications...and that's just sermon preparation! Add the weight of shepherding the flock; bearing spiritual burdens; meeting unrealistic expectations; and fighting personal, cultural, and theological battles, and the challenges can be overwhelming.

However, the heaviest burden I bear as a pastor is recognizing and mitigating the toll pastoral ministry takes on my family, and especially on my children. My children did not volunteer for this duty; they were conscripted. Nor is there the remotest possibility of them opting out. As long as I serve, my children are PKs. And as long as my children are PKs, I am a shepherd of two flocks who must seek God's best for both. But as much as I love the church, and am committed to her health and well-being, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 1:4).

That is why reading this chapter, and what it represents, brings me unspeakable joy. Jasmine is our firstborn. As such, she has witnessed and endured more triumphs and trials than any of our other children. I am humbled by her wisdom, insight, candor, and spiritual maturity. More importantly, I am grateful for the grace God has shown her and the way He has used the crucible of growing up in the home of a pastor to shape her into a tool through which He gives help, hope, and healing to the body of Christ.

Warmly,
Voddie Baucham

Dear Pastor's Kid,

Hi, my name is Voddie's Daughter.

Certainly, that's not what's on my birth certificate, but it's the name I grew up hearing most often. "This is Voddie's Daughter," and, "Oh, wait, you're Voddie's Daughter?" and, "I can't believe you are Voddie's Daughter!"

My given name is Jasmine. And though many people don't take the time to learn it, the name is precious to me.

It wasn't always. When I was a kid, I bemoaned my floral name and thirsted after a handle with a bit more meaning. After all, it's *just* a flower—and not even a very good-smelling one at that! But, as I got older, I began to realize that, even if my name itself didn't have a very full meaning, I would come to give it the meaning that it lacked. When applied to me, Jasmine is not just a flower, but a girl with unique thoughts, feelings, gifts, callings, and aspirations. When it is applied to me, Jasmine is a deeply meaningful name, because it's a name attached to a person who has more meaning than any flower of the field.

And it's attached to a person who has more meaning than "just" that of a PK.

What is your name? And what does it mean? Not in the baby name book sense, but in the "Who are you?" sense. At twenty-seven years of age, I'm still figuring out my own personal answers to that question. Some of the defining factors are easier than others. I am Phillip's wife, Wynn's mama, and hopefully mama to a lot of other littles someday. I am a member of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, a teacher at St. Augustine School, and a writer. I am a friend and a mentor.

Some of the things are less visible and less important, but they're still important in the fabric of who I am. My favorite ice cream flavor (vanilla), my favorite color (any earth tone), my favorite movie from childhood (*The Princess Diaries*). What are your favorite things?

One thing that *is* a huge part of my identity, that belongs right up there after Phillip's wife and Wynn's mama, is that I am my father's daughter. But I also know that it isn't the *most* important thing about me.

Thank God for Your Dad

Don't get me wrong. I love my dad. For me as a homeschool student, he has been one of my favorite teachers, counselors, and confidants. We have myriad memories together, inside jokes, and well-worn conversational topics. He is my biggest advocate, my constant cheerleader, and my rock when the stresses of this life overwhelm me.

My dad was an amazing earthly example of God's fatherly love toward His children (1 John 1:3). He protected me (2 Thess. 3:3), he provided for me (Luke 12:24), he patiently instructed me (Ps. 25:12), and he led our family (Ps. 5:8). He did all of these things imperfectly, of course—God is the only perfect Father—but he did them with love, commitment, and diligence.

My dad is probably a little bit like your dad, in that he takes his responsibility as a father very seriously and loves me very much. One of my favorite stories illustrates this point in a hilarious way.

Back in the mid-2010s, body scanners were beginning to crop up in airports. When they were first launched, these scanners showed the human body in very intricate detail. Not only were they more invasive than metal detectors; some also believed that they violated our rights to privacy. My dad was one of these people.

We were on our way back from a trip to Atlanta, and my dad turned to his big family and said, "If they try to put you through the scanner, opt out." Now, we all knew that opting out meant a pretty invasive pat-down, and, in the grand scheme of things, it was a toss-up between whether we wanted airport security looking at our underwear or almost touching them. But, for my dad, it was the principle of the thing!

Back in those days, not everyone went through the body scanners. Customers would be randomly selected. Of course, yours truly was tapped and pulled out of the line.

Well, my dad hit the roof. He went on a patriotic speech about how we are American citizens and should not have to stand for such treatment! I will never forget the scene, or the way Dad hovered nearby during the pat-down to make sure I felt comfortable and safe.

I would be lying if I said that I wasn't a little bit embarrassed by all of the attention my dad's principles drew. But I would also be lying if I

said I wasn't a little proud of him for standing up for me and doing his best to protect me.

And he really always has. From letting me sleep on his chest when I was just a tiny baby to trying his best to do my hair before school, from teaching me how to ride a bike or how to float in the swimming pool, from giving me advice in my friendships to being my confidant when I had crushes, from vetting my boyfriends to walking me down the aisle, from counseling me through the tough season after my son was born to being the jungle gym my little boy loves to climb.

Remember your dad's love for you. Recount the blessing of his faithfulness often. So many do not know the beauty of having a father who fears the Lord, and who takes his responsibility toward his children seriously (Eph. 6:1-4). Where your dad emulates your Father in heaven, encourage him and be encouraged! That is a gift! And it is not one that we should take for granted, although that can be so easy to do. But having a father who points you back to your Father in heaven is no small thing.

Thank God for Your Family

And because of that gift, there is part of me that doesn't mind being known as Voddie's Daughter, because that's a huge part of who I am. It would be foolish to pretend that my dad hasn't had a pivotal role in teaching and training me. You are your father's son or daughter, and that is a beautiful thing. You belong to a family that was put together by God for His glory, and that is an amazing gift.

In Ephesians 4, Paul begins talking about the local church, and how our relationships within the body can shape us for God's glory. He establishes the church as our primary source of Christian community, then brings his focus a bit narrower to talk about how the family is an even smaller community that we are blessed to be part of.

In chapter 5, he gives husbands the responsibility to love, lead, and disciple their wives (v. 25 and following). He charges them to be willing to sacrifice for them. He gives them the immense responsibility of cultivating a relationship with their wives that echoes the relationship between Christ and His church.

And he doesn't stop there. In Ephesians 6, he extends the responsibility for leading and guiding past the husband/wife relationship and into the parent/child relationship. He charges fathers to bring their children up "in the training and admonition of the Lord" (v. 4). This echoes the command that the Israelites were given in Deuteronomy, before entering the promised land:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and your gates. (Deut. 6:4-9)

In this chapter, Moses gives the Israelites the incredible responsibility of cultivating family cultures that glorify and honor the Lord. What is your family culture like? What will you miss when you're gone, or what do you miss now that you've left?

When I got married, I missed my family's culture much more than I anticipated. One of my favorite parts of it was gathering around the breakfast table every morning to recite the catechism.

"Who made you?" my mom or dad used to ask.

"God!" my brother and I used to clamor, but as we grew into adulthood we listened to our younger siblings.

"What else did God make?"

"God made all things!"

"Why did God make you and all things?"

"For His own glory!"

Breakfast seemed so quiet when I left! It was just me and my husband, and I missed those sweet little voices being disciplined by my parents. And I missed being one of those little voices, too!

My parents understood their responsibility to disciple us and raise us in the discipline and instruction of God. I am so grateful for that! If

your parents understand this, it's no small thing. Their obedience is an immense blessing to you.

Thank God You're an Arrow

But God did not create us to be born, to live, and to die in the exact same families that we started out in. In fact, one of the major purposes of being raised in a Christian family is to live out a legacy of godliness in our own homes.

Back in Ephesians 5, we read, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (v. 31). So mothers and fathers raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, then those children grow up and get married and raise more children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord...and that's how we establish a godly legacy. In fact, even if these adult children never get married, they still grow up and proclaim the gospel to others (Matt. 28:16–20) and have “spiritual children” whom they teach and train for God's glory.

In Proverbs, Solomon tells us that children are like arrows in the hands of a mighty warrior (Ps. 127:4). Arrows do a warrior no good if they stay in his pack; they are made to be launched in battle. Similarly, pastors' kids aren't made to sit in their parents' shadows for the rest of their lives; they are made to be launched from their homes and into a hurting world after having been trained to bring the good news of Christ Jesus.

So, all of that teaching and training that your parents are pouring into you are ultimately being poured for God's glory—not their own. For me, this has been beautifully illustrated by my marriage to my husband. I lived at home with my family until I was twenty-four. Even though I was working, in grad school, and doing “my own thing” a lot of the time, much of my daily life still revolved around the Baucham flow. I helped my mom around the house, helped homeschool my siblings, worked in my dad's ministry in different capacities, and was an active member of our church.

There were definitely challenges to being an adult daughter living at home. I have a wonderful relationship with both of my parents, but that didn't stop us from occasionally butting heads. I love my siblings like