“HIDE AND SEEK”

 It is a cool, November evening and the sun is setting in a little, southern Illinois town of Brighton. Sitting in the middle of this rural town is the First Baptist Church, whose steeple has cast a shadow over the small rural town for the past 51 years. The church is surrounded in the back by a corn /soybean field depending on the alternating year. To the north side sits a grand city park with a couple of houses that fall in-between. To the south side of the church, sitting on the property, is the church parsonage which is home to the pastor and his family. Pastor Rob Ellard and his dear wife, Donna, first came to the rural church 10 years ago with a three year old boy named AJ and Donna expecting twins. Now having celebrated their ten year anniversary at the church, the parsonage gladly gives refuge to Pastor Ellard, his wife, Donna, and there now 6 beautiful children (AJ, Adam & Alyssa “the twins”, Allison, Abigail, and Aaron).

 As the cool November breeze blows saying good bye to a setting sun, the church prepares for a Friday night of ministry and activity. The church parking lot is receiving cars and ejecting its passengers to the cries of “I FOUND YOU!” or “THERE HE IS GET HIM!” This cry may seem odd to those who are just arriving for church ministry, however, further examination sheds light upon another ministry that is not directly related to the church, but has everything to do with building a strong church. Further examination reveals the cries and frivolity of (me) the pastor and his children as they play hide-and-seek on the church and parsonage property. Now this may seem as a dereliction of duty to some that the church would be involved in ministry and me, the pastor, not be there directly involved in the work. If you were to catch me as I ran by and asked me of the seemingly “neglect” of the ministry, I would hastily reply that I am not neglecting the ministry, but rather working very hard in my most important ministry and that is the ministry of my home and family.

 As a Christian, husband, father and preacher/pastor, I have a very deep and fundamental belief that my home and my family are my most important ministry and everything after that is secondary. I will be quick to assert that my walk with God is priority! My relationship with Christ is my most important relationship, however, my relationship with my wife and children fall easily into second place.

 Having been surrounded by the ministry all of my life, I have perceived a philosophy in Christians, ministry leaders, and yes, pastors also that the ministry to others comes before their ministry to their family. The attitude usually asserted is that the spouse and children will just have to understand that it is the ministry and I am doing the work of the Lord. As I write this article I am a second generation preacher, I am a few months shy of 4o years old, I have pastored two rural churches in Illinois to total 12 years; I have made a study of relationships and people for 20 years and I have seen “good” Christian homes and relationships sever due to the “ministry.”

 May I boldly say that it is not the “ministries” fault that there have been so many failed relationships in its path. The failure has come and the fault is placed at the feet of individuals who do not understand or exercise the principle of balance in their life. To have balance means “to be equal or proportionate to”. That means you are going to invest the same amount of your time, talent, and treasure in your home as you do your ministry. The failure that I have seen with some ministry leaders is that they are better at dealing with strangers and acquaintances than they are their own families. It is easier for them to connect with individuals without intimacy than it is to connect with their family with intimacy. Wives have become embittered with a husband that will invest and run to the aid of others, but will never invest and run to her aid. Children have become embittered within their hearts by parents who are always there for other children and their problems instead of their own heartaches and issues.

 Now stepping outside of the ministry (my arena of living) I see the same failure in laymen who are spending too much time in their careers and career building than they are at developing their relationships. The above mentioned failures are the same. There are individuals who are not balancing their life to meet the needs of their families and who are begging for the love and attention of their loved ones. There is more to life than a time clock and pay check. A happy and fulfilling relationship with your family is priceless.

 There is a distressing issue that is finding its way into our churches and “Christian” homes. The issue is the lack of attention that God’s people are putting into their relationships and homes. Our spouses and families need our attention! God does not require you to neglect family to build your career, ministry, fame, or fortune. The cry needs to be “TURN YOUR HEART BACK TO YOUR HOME!”

 Why will you find me playing hide-and-seek on a Friday night. The answer is that I understand that my children need a father who will teach them and have fun with them. I will make the time and take the time to spend with my children. If this requires me to allow others to minister in the work of Christ without me at times; so be it. I must invest the time necessary with my family.

 Ask yourself these questions:

1. Is Christ first in my life? If not where is He?
2. Where is my relationship with my spouse within my priorities?
3. Where is the relationship with my children within my priorities?
4. Am I maintaining balance in my life in regards to ministry, career, family, etc?
5. Am I willing to make the changes necessary to give my family time?

Written by Pastor Rob Ellard, Pastor of the First Baptist Church, January 6, 2012