The Pastor’s Kid: Finding Your Own Faith and Identity

By Barnabas Piper

Reviewed by Jonathan Coombs

My father is a Pastor.
My grandfather was a Pastor.
My great grandfather was a Pastor too.

When I was a boy I lay on top of my bed one night bailing my eyes out.

The reason?
I didn’t want to be a Pastor.

Because of the heritage of my family I thought that to be a Coombs meant you had to be a Pastor. I looked down the generations and saw that the first born son turned out to be a Pastor. Something at the age of twelve, I didn’t want to be.

This was one of many unique challenges I remember growing up as a Pastor’s kid. Granted, this was more a phenomenon of our family’s rich Christian tradition. Yet, there are other challenges of living with the forever abbreviated title of ‘PK’ that others don’t face. And these challenges are the reason I find the book, ‘The Pastor’s Kid’ by Barnabas Piper, an excellent book.

Piper has recently published this book about PKs for PKs, Pastors and churches. A book that describes the unique challenges PKs have faced being the children of ministers.

Throughout the book there is evidence of someone who seeks to serve individuals and churches well by highlighting the challenges that come from being a child with a Pastor as a parent. Through his own experience as a PK and conversations with others, Piper gives insight into these challenges.

As Piper puts it, ‘The constant pressure to be something, do something, and believe something creates enormous confusion for PKs. And one of the main confusions is about who we are...’ After all, nobody chooses to be a PK, you’re either born into it or brought into it through the calling of your parents.

On one hand it’s a privilege. The constant meeting of new people from different parts of the world, hearing of what God is doing in different countries and places. The unconscious absorption of biblical teaching, and the community of people that you’re surrounded by. All these things provide the PK with tremendous opportunity to hear about God and what He has done and is continuing to do.

On the other hand, it’s a situation where the fishbowl of the local church can strangle the life out of you, where there is ambivalence to the truth because you’ve heard the stories so often. Church becomes a place where everyone knows you, but no one actually knows you. Where expectations are laid on thick, from parents to congregation, and where you get to see the ugliness of sinners dealing with sinners from the front row.

Therefore, PKs turn out differently as they seek to find themselves within the life of the church and the world around them. Some stay within the faith, following in the steps of their parents. Others rebel, leaving the church behind for a lifetime apart from God. And others end up finding God and their place in the world in a way that is their own.

And so Piper rightly highlights the need for grace, both for the PK, for the Pastor and the church as they seek to grow from within the all-encompassing nature of church ministry. Grace that is experienced and shown, not just told. Grace that recognises that legalism and rules won’t help. Grace that recognises the PK’s own journey of faith-discovery and self-discovery. Grace that is therefore holistic, unassuming, respectful and full of hope for the PK as a person. Grace that comes from Jesus Christ, shown through the Pastor and the church.

A PK isn’t anyone special. They are as special as everyone else. But they do have unique challenges and these are highlighted by Piper. This book is a great conversation starter for you and your family. I strongly recommend you buy this book - read it and talk about it. It'll help you as a PK. It'll help you as a Pastor. And it'll help you as a church member.

Jonathan Coombs is the Young Adult and Church Partnership Consultant for Global Interaction Victoria. This involved facilitating short-term mission teams, running young adult events, speaking at various churches, and meeting with pastors and young adults to talk about the possibility of involvement in global missions. He blogs at joncoombs.com and would be more than willing to catch up with anyone who wishes to share their story about being a PK.