



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

Barnabas Piper

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The Only One Facing As Much Pressure As the Pastor is ... The Pastor's Kid Dad may be following God's call, but the Pastor's kids (PKs) are just following mom and dad. Often to devastating results. Barnabas Piper – son of Pastor and bestselling author John Piper – has experienced the challenges of being a PK first-hand. With empathy, humor, and personal stories, he addresses the pervasive assumptions, identity issues and accelerated scrutiny PKs face. But more than just stating the problems – he shares the one thing a PK needs above all else (as do their pastor/father and church) is to live in true freedom and wholeness.

The Pastor's Kid: Finding Your Own Faith and Identity Details

Date : Published June 1st 2014 by David C. Cook

ISBN : 9780781410359

Author : Barnabas Piper

Format : Paperback 160 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Christian, Christian Living, Parenting, Biography, Religion, Church, Christianity

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From Reader Review The Pastor's Kid: Finding Your Own Faith and Identity for online ebook

Jeanie says

I am not a Pastor's kid (PK) and I am not the parent of one, however, I am sinner just like them. This little book resonated with me because I have had a crisis of faith due to loosing sight of my identity in Christ. With expectations that has killed any grace to give or to receive. PK's are just like you and me, however, anyone who is in leadership and is related to anyone in ministry leadership have a life of a fish bowl. Many times we loose sight of who we are because of expectations. We have a desire to be known and life in a bowl that is nearly impossible.

Barnabas Piper experience has a PK the son of John Piper who has influenced so many including myself with his sound teaching and passion for the supremacy of God, is real, grace filled, and makes the gospel come alive with his own unique insight that his different from his father but just as effective.

Thank you David Cook and Net Galley for the opportunity to review with my honest opinion.

Bob Hayton says

As a former pastor's kid (and assistant pastor's kid, and later a missionary's kid), this book intrigued me. As a former member of John Piper's church, this book had special relevance for me. The author is Barnabus Piper, one of Pastor John's sons. As a Christian who is recovering from legalism, this book was especially helpful for me.

In "The Pastor's Kid: Finding Your Own Faith and Identity" (David C. Cook, 2014), Barnabus opens up about the struggles of growing up in a fish bowl. The author doesn't claim to be a guru, but he is a pastor's kid who struggled and erred, but also grew and matured and looks back on his time as a pastor's kid and feels the need to share his experience both for the benefit of pastors but especially for the help of fellow pastor's kids who may not have turned out as well as he. There are a lot of pastor's kids, and some of them have jettisoned their parents' faith and are jarred by the experience. Other's may not yet have come to grips with why they struggle so much in particular ways.

This book explores the unique challenges of pastor's kids and yet doesn't burn the parents and blame them for all the problems. Pastor John actually writes the foreword and while Barnabus spares no punches, one gets the sense that their relationship is in-tact and both respect the other.

This is part memoir, and part self-help. And it isn't all Piper's memoir, as he shares stories from countless pastor's kids he interviewed in preparation for the book. Some of them are not in the faith anymore, and it does us good to wonder why. Barnabus' prescription calls for grace and care for children, and a proper set of expectations. He also gives hope to those who have been burned, or are wondering what they can possibly due at this stage in the game.

I particularly appreciated his emphasis on legalism. This excerpt resonates well with me:

"Not everything is right or wrong, true or false, yes or no. The PK needs some maybes and sort ofs. If every

question is answered in black and white and every decision judged as right or wrong, the PK never learns to make value decisions. In fact, he never learns values at all. He just learns to dance the morality two-step and avoid getting out of step with what's 'good' or 'true.' If every question is given a concrete answer and no room is left for exploration or doubt, the PK is forced to either acquiesce or bury his doubts where they can fester and rot his faith." (p. 83)

I listened to the Christianaudio version of the book. This was extra special in that Barnabus Piper himself was the one reading his book. This made listening to the book more poignant as his passion for his book's message was evident.

This book is well-written and preaches an important message. I don't know of any other similar book that is designed to both help those who have been hurt, and equip those in the ministry now who are raising another generation of children. Cautions are raised and challenges issued, but grace and hope pervade the book. This is must reading for churches, pastors and of course, pastor's kids.

Disclaimer: This book was provided by Christianaudio. The reviewer was under no obligation to offer a positive review.

Mark Jr. says

I admit I was curious to hear what the son of one of my favorite authors would say about his upbringing... But I believe I can honestly say that my most powerful motivation in picking up this (audio) book was to gain wisdom about how to spare my own children from as many of the negative consequences of being a "PK" as possible. (I'm a P of a sort, and I have two K's—and one on the way.) Neither motivation was quite satisfied, and I think that's okay. It was still a worthwhile book.

Barnabas' father gets it right in the preface: the book can be something of a downer, but all throughout you can sense that Barnabas is a true follower of Christ—and you can skip to chapter 8 if you need a grace infusion. I actually took this advice, then went back and listened to the chapters I'd skipped.

I did get many valuable tidbits from the book, and I appreciated how Barnabas did not give in to the temptation to relate juicy details from the Piper household. Not that he isn't authentic; but he did seem to me to be pretty careful not to gossip. Unless I missed it, he never told his own story of straying and repentance in any but the barest outline. I think that was wise, a show of love for God and for readers. It seems to me to be part of the point of the book that the PK's private details are just that.

I did feel a number of times, I admit, that Barnabas should have boiled this entire book down to an article making a few points:

- 1) PKs are often judged more harshly than others, and they feel singled out and like they can't be truly known.
- 2) PKs need their dads to be dads, not pastoral counselors.
- 3) PKs should not be asked questions about their fathers' thoughts on any subject.

4) PKs are just normal kids, not Bible scholars.

5) Pastors should not use ministry to excuse workaholism but should make their families primary—without shirking their ministry duties, either.

6) Churches demand too much of their pastors.

7) Being a PK is, both because of and in spite of the foregoing points, a valuable training ground for future ministry.

Barnabas was strongest when speaking from personal experience. True to point 4 above, this isn't a book full of deep exegetical or theological insight. But it definitely contains practical wisdom.

And because of point 4, I'm going to go soft on him with regard to theological stuff. I'll only say a) that he was nothing less than dismissive of 1 Tim 3:4 and Titus 1:6; and b) that he's vague about the non-essential theological differences he wishes pastors would let their kids have with them as they grow. I found this a little off-putting—like we should trust PKs over their pastor-fathers to determine whether a given theological difference is significant or not. But the point was well taken that PKs are expected to stay in the slice of Christianity they grew up in, and Barnabas felt (what he believed to be) undue pressure not to defect from that slice. There's wisdom there: I need to stay aware of the pressures my kids face, including that one.

One other little point for my own slice of Christianity: it struck me that Barnabas Piper, son of the man who wrote a (not the) book on grace, still levied the charge of legalism at his upbringing. He wasn't specific, and he wasn't nasty. But he sounded exactly like countless of my ex-fundamentalist Facebook friends—and like me sometimes, truth be known. He speaks with love and appreciation for the spiritual leaders God gave him as a young person, but he feels in some unspecified way that they were too strict and didn't explain their rules. Here's my point: moving one or two slices to the "left" may or may not rid you of the problems you thought you left behind. I just couldn't help but think of an extremely penetrating essay I read from Timothy Larsen of Wheaton College a while back (<http://bit.ly/1iQjnbF>): he pointed out that one reason we remember our teachers as being simplistic is that they were trying to teach *us*, and that's all we could receive. Perhaps our memories of past legalism are not truly just.

Barnabas himself read the book on the recording I received free from Christian Audio. I do tend to prefer hearing the author. You get a feel for his feelings, and that's valuable. Barnabas did a good job. And he has performed a valuable service for Christ's body in writing this little book.

Michele Morin says

We love our Pastor's kids. After reading Piper's book, I will be more diligent in my prayers for them. Even more important, I will be more fervent in my prayers for their parents. As an involved church member, I have witnessed the "PK phenomenon" first hand. I have heard pastors lament that their children do not share enthusiasm for their pastor-father's calling. Now I have read 151 pages of in-depth analysis of how one person felt growing up in that role.

My interest in this book has been very high from the moment I first heard that it was on its way because, although we are not involved in vocational ministry, my husband and I have been volunteers in our church since all four of our boys were very young. This has been fairly public involvement that has involved Sunday

morning visibility, more dinner-time phone calls than average, and lots of schedule adjustments around church activities and business. It is also relevant, I think, that we made a conscious decision at one point to relinquish some responsibilities because we saw that the demands of our family were escalating as our boys matured. Go figure. It takes more energy to greet the teenager at curfew than it does to comfort the toddler with an ear infection or feed the baby twice in the night. Having said that, I spent some time as I read the book trying to assess whether a pastor's family really does have more of a "burden" to bear from the church than the highly-involved church member. After all, those who are doing "vocational ministry" are able to give themselves to the job seamlessly. Obviously, it is going to involve more than forty hours — there's hardly a professional position out there that can be accomplished in forty hours. Volunteers are balancing their 40+ and then doing church business on top of it. Therefore, their children are also "sharing" their parents with Jesus (who, by the way, is also their dad's and mum's "Boss"). Because I have this question about Piper's thesis, I questioned two of my kids (ages 15 and 12) and one of their friends (age 12 and a deacon's kid) as they were digesting their morning waffles. Do you feel as if the people at church know more about you than you are comfortable with? Do you feel as if their expectations are higher for you than for other kids? Do you think they expect you to be an angel? (Snorts over this one, as they regularly give evidence to the contrary.) Do you feel as if you have to fake it/perform because your parents are involved at church?

No. They do not seem to be suffering from the fish bowl effect. Clearly, my sample is smaller than Pipers, and it is likely that my survey group was basking in the attitude-enhancing warmth of a belly full of chocolate waffles with peanut butter sauce. Nonetheless, my heart aches for Barnabas Piper and his comrades in the fish bowl. Some of the questions he raises seem to be borne out of so much sadness that he is unable to see the grace of God he eventually gets around to trumpeting in later chapters. For instance, on page 25: Of course children are not "consulted" in their parents' call to ministry. Is God not sovereign in His placement of children in families? Does He not, by virtue of assigning the PK to a pastor's family (and an MK to a missionary family and a DK to a deacon's family), promise grace to that child to BE and to DO and to endure the assignment?

Did the author really bristle under all the attention he received at church? Does his mastery of "The Tricks of the Trade" (page 54) really arise from his identity as a PK, or would he have become an "onion" even if his father had not achieved rock-star status? Has Barnabas asked himself whether his book would have ever seen day light without his father's reputation and notoriety?

I hesitate to mention one factor because I am aware of it only because of John Piper's books (and possibly a sermon or two); and I applaud his transparency, even though I know that this has been a sore spot for his son. Piper the elder has made no secret of the fact that he and Noel have weathered some tough times in their marriage. So, even though it may not be any of my business to even WONDER about, I do question whether some of Barnabas's thin-skinned and prickly response to life in a pastor's home might be a result of the particular pastor's home where he gathered his data for 18 years. When Mum and Dad are barely cordial to each other for extended periods of time, even though they are on their faces before God about it and working to make things better, it has to affect the children.

Fortunately, the cloud in *The Pastor's Kid* lifts, and Piper does give some very encouraging news about adult PK's who experience benefit from their years of "apprenticeship" in a pastor's home. This book, the fruit of Barnabas Piper's apprenticeship, should be read by every parent who is called to ministry, whether full-time or as a volunteer. Our attitudes toward ministry are contagious. Our Pharisaism is deadly. Perhaps this book will prevent further heartache, and hopefully it will spark more conversations like we had this morning in our home — and hopefully more waffles, too.

John Brackbill says

I'm guessing this would be a 3 star review if I had started with chapter 8. But alas I did not. The tone of this book grated on me. I listen to it and I thought surely it is simply because of the way the person is reading it. Then I realized that the author is the narrator!

To be honest it was a depressing book. Maybe it was because it raised so many concerns of my own heart about how my children are or will deal with these challenges and how I am either helping them or not helping them. Nevertheless this was a labor for me to listen to.

If it wasn't for chapter eight, I would think that Barnabas was very bitter. Chapter 8 does emphasize the blessings of being in a pastor's home in spite of all the very clearly listed challenges. To be honest though the tone of chapter 8 is so different than the rest of the book it raises questions in my mind as to how the two tones in the book coexist together.

Though it was a labor I was profited by the book because it did make me more concerned about some possible pitfalls for my children and it certainly scared me enough to encourage me to pray even more!

I remain unconvinced that things have to be interpreted like Barnabas interpreted some of the challenges as a preacher's kid but I'm thankful that he at least transparently communicated his concerns as it did make me evaluate my roll in shepherding my own family. And yes I do think it's legitimate to speak of shepherding or pastoring my family even if Barnabas questions whether or not that's helpful to say :-)

All that said, one mark of a helpful book is that it challenges you and helpfully changes your outlook or your approach to things and I must admit that this book was helpful at least in some ways like this.

Peter says

A fantastic book that refocused my walk with Christ. Barnabas offers insight and direction into those who found the challenges of being a PK difficult (as I did), and are having a hard time seeing Christ as anything but "dad's boss," or messages and hymns that the PK has memorized as "mundane." Thanks, Barnabas, for this book.

Nick says

This book has been really good for me. For most of my life I have been a PK, and now I am in the ministry myself. I can identify with quite a bit of what Barnabas has written about the difficulties and blessings of growing up in that kind of environment: I was often under the microscope, expected to be the leader, and preached at in the home.

I am also reminded of how blessed I have been to view my experience in a (mostly) positive light. There were some negatives to be sure, but my parents worked hard to avoid several of the pitfalls that he describes in this book. But I know other PK's who weren't as fortunate. Barnabas doesn't claim to speak for every PK,

but I think he speaks for a majority. He doesn't just write from his limited experience--he has spent time interviewing other PKs and doing research--and so I think it rings true.

I recommend that anyone in ministry should read it and take note; PKs read it and know that you are not alone; and congregants read it with an eye to supporting and praying for their ministers and PKs.

Jon Hansel says

A helpful insight into the life of a pastor's kid but should not be seen as a representation of the experience of all pastor's kids. The overall tone of the book has an undercurrent of cynicism. My main disappointment is that while Piper tells us many times that it is not meant to be an expose of life in the John Piper household, enough care was not taken with some of the examples and stories to protect the reader from seeds of suspicion about exactly what he experienced in his relationship with his father.

There are bright moments of practical application, but I was left yearning for more grace and greater exposition of the power of gospel-reconciliation. It was sad to hear little gratitude or specific appreciation for his upbringing beyond the sweeping generalizations of chapter eight. In my opinion, it was a book written before the writer has sufficiently walked for an extended season beyond his experiences. Many of the exhortations given to pastor parents could be directed to parents in any profession. The impact of this book could have been farther reaching at the age of 40 with what feels like a couple of blog posts stretched into a book.

Aliyah says

This book was really helpful in exploring some of the things that PKs go through. It was very accurate/realistic when talking about identity issues and the expectations that we face. I think it is worth reading even if not everything is applicable or relevant (not everything will be) to a specific PK's situation because it really helps to process and identify the problems that we could be unaware of.

The thing that I didn't like so much was the negativity. At times Piper seems really critical and bordering on rude. Now I know that in a book like this, the weaknesses of the Pastor and the church are going to be pointed out. However, I feel that that probably could have been done in a more honouring and respectful way and more writing could have been devoted to praising and recognising Pastors and the church for all they do. It would be easy, to just read the book and feel sorry for yourself because of the different struggles you might grow up with rather than feeling thankful for the amazing privilege it is. I think it would have been helpful for Piper to write more than he did about the joys of being a PK and the unique opportunities we have. A lot of people would have benefited from looking on the positive side more and coming away with a grateful spirit. If you fail to take to heart the real message of what Piper is saying, and focus on the weaknesses in your parents and the church, then you've missed the point. Piper is trying to let PKs know they are not alone, help them to make sense of the struggles they face, and give them a picture of the grace that they need to accept and show to others. So, it's important to not get caught up in the criticism Piper is giving. Overall, this book was helpful and insightful - I benefited from reading it and I'm sure it has been a huge blessing to many PKs.

Amanda Beguerie says

I'm very glad I read this book.

So much of it is so true and I agreed with so much of it. I am a pastors kid and have found that not all this describes me, but it applies to me in more ways than I thought.

I understand being watched. I understand the expectations placed on me. I understand being known of but not really known.

I know what it's like to know so much about the church and the people, and I know what it's like to feel like I'm carrying a lot of burdens.

I don't remember a time when I wasn't the daughter of a ministry-involved family. I can't recall a day when the name of Jesus wasn't mentioned at least a dozen times or we didn't have a theological discussion around the dinner table.

And as much as this book points out the numerous challenges PKs face, it also reveals the many blessings of growing up in a Bible-saturated home.

The writing and the format was wonderful. I loved the model, and I even cried at one point because of how true I found it to be.

I recommend this to all Pastor's Kids, and others who want to know what it's like in our shoes.

Gavin Breeden says

This is probably a helpful book for any Christian to read in that it'll help you think about how you parent your own children and how to interact with your pastor's kids. But for pastors and pastor's kids this may be essential reading. Most of the stuff in here is sort of common sense-- don't put tons of expectations and pressure on PKs, give them grace, focus on being their parent rather than their pastor, don't be a workaholic, etc.-- but there are also a few things I'd never considered before and it's really helpful to hear it all from someone who has lived through it. Granted, Barnabas Piper probably has somewhat of a unique experience given that he is a "famous" preacher's kid. (He describes getting his dad's words quoted back to him on social media by devoted fans of his father sometimes, which sounds absolutely horrible.) But a lot of his experience is the same as other PKs and just to be sure he corresponded with a number of other PKs to hear about their experiences while writing the book. Most of the book details the difficulties of being a PK presented pretty frankly but the final chapter ends with a bit of hope as he considers a few of the benefits of grouping up as a PK. As a father of three small kids I needed to read this. I hope and pray it'll help me avoid some of the mistakes described within. But I know I won't be perfect (and neither will they). So, when my kids are older I'll repent of the specific mistakes I made and hand them a copy of this book. I think it'll help.

Nathan Seale says

An insightful work that allows a glimpse into the world of the PK. This is not just a book for pastors as it

highlights the importance of the pastor putting his family before his ministry but also gives practical advice for people in a church on interacting with the children of their pastor. Strangely enough, most children don't like people randomly bringing up sermon illustration in which they are prominently featured. Overall a helpful and thoughtful treatise.

Jay says

A few random thoughts:

Like many evangelical books, this could have been a long magazine article.

It felt like an adolescent, "feel my pain" sort of confessional. I'm sure being the child of a pastor is hard, but it's not like being raised by meth-heads. I mean, I have a friend whose dad used to make him drink the blood of chickens sacrificed in voodoo rituals. Childhood's challenging for a lot of people.

I think he's mistaking some of the difficulty of being a human being as being the difficulty of being a PK.

He implies that "counsel of Romans" has little to do with actual real life problems (p. 104).

He finally gets around to giving advice to the PKs themselves (for two pages, starting on p. 129). That advice consists of (1) forgive those who have made your life so hard, (2) express your frustrations more freely, (3) understand that all churches are imperfect. Good advice, but it felt like there's more to be said.

Amy Meyers says

Disappointed, but not surprised, to find typical evangellyfish mush in this book, but a little surprised to find so much crybaby in it. The thought came to me about 75% of the way through that the only thing that does more to convince me of J. Piper's failings as a father is not Barnabas' proofs for it, but the actual writing of the book itself. B. Piper should fall on his knees and weep with gratitude that he didn't grow up in a fatherless home in Africa, as do most of the people that we minister to. And what grace, on top of grace he has received, that his own father displays to write the foreword for his son's rude, ungrateful book, and write humbly, giving him the grace he demands, all the while they both must be knowing that B. Piper will only be published and have lots of copies sold because of he is his father's son. B. capitalizes on the very thing he complains about in the book to sell it. It's certainly not his writing style that sells it, which is very simplistic and overuses buzzwords or annoying "raw" terms such as "stupid."

J. Is right, though. The last chapter is better than the rest. Don't throw the baby out with the bath water. You can come away with some thoughts to apply to your parenting of your kids, even if you end up taking the opposite tack (for example, I found it ironic that after some trials we've been through recently, another ministry wife advised me NOT to talk to my kids or in front of them about it so they wouldn't become bitter about people, and then B. advises the opposite), it will help you be more compassionate and see things through your kids' lenses. Hopefully you will also think to show your kids the benefits of their positions as well. But as B. said, some kids are just contrary. If they know you really want them to do something, they purposely do the opposite. This is true of all Christian homes, not just the pastor's. Anyway, read the book if you can find it free somewhere and if it applies to your situation as a PK or someone in ministry. It only takes about 3 hours.

Jason says

As a PK myself, and now a father of six PKs, I picked up this book to see if I could learn some things for my own parenting. I believe I did learn from this book, but not what the author intended. Perhaps it was because I look back on my own experience so differently than he did. I didn't feel like I lived in a fishbowl. I didn't worry about other people's expectations. I didn't have any identity crisis. There was not much in me that resonated with the "PK" presented in this book.

The author's aim was to raise awareness of the struggles of PKs, but I believe he did so in a distinctly unhelpful manner. As he attempted to speak for PKs to pastors and to the church, he did not help us to see our lives from the perspective of Christ and His Word. In fact, I could not help but feel bad for him as I read his book. He feels like he has come up with some kind of answers, but I'm not convinced he even understands the problems he is trying to wrestle with. This book does not breathe the fresh, free mountain air of God's grace; it struggles in the claustrophobic atmosphere of one's own problems.

I truly hope the author continues to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior. Perhaps writing this book will be helpful for him in that growing process. But I would not recommend this book for any PK. It will not turn your eyes to Christ.

One thing I learned from this book was what a wonderful blessing the Scriptures are. They bring clarity where this book does not.
