importance of family. And so in the early years of my ministry, I operated by the principle that “the work” must always come first.

I loved my dear wife very much, but I expected her to understand that as a minister’s wife she must make sacrifices. What’s more, she should make them willingly and cheerfully. I might have to be gone days at a time. I might be out most evenings. When I was home, I would have to be studying and couldn’t be disturbed. Even on Sundays I studied or visited.

My wife felt terribly lonely and neglected. What is worse, she suffered guilt feelings for this. Wasn’t she supposed to make these sacrifices for “the Lord’s work” cheerfully? Maybe her loneliness and unhappiness meant that she wasn’t really consecrated. I’m afraid that I did little to reassure her. I offered only the standard “Do you want me to change jobs?”

The climax came when, as conference youth director, I was working with a three-week series of Voice of Youth tent meetings at a location about 150 miles from home. One morning I received an urgent phone call. Peggy had become ill and had been taken to the hospital. She was to undergo a surgical procedure (not major) that required general anesthesia. She was frightened. But we had a meeting scheduled for that evening. “If you need me, I’ll come now,” I offered. In her fear and uncertainty, she needed me desperately, but—a good Christian girl that she was—she knew the appropriate answer. “No, I’ll be all right. You stay for the meeting. I know that’s important. But pray for me.”

Of course, she was hoping against hope that I would come anyway. But I didn’t. I accepted at face value the words I wanted to hear and ignored the heart cry that I was too insensitive to perceive. I did drive home late that night and visited her in the hospital the next day. But then it was back to the tent. She was in the hospital for a week, during which time I made another visit or two to her, always sandwiching them in between the “really important work.”

It wasn’t until later on, with meetings over and Peggy back home, that she found a way to tell me about her real feelings. As I let the import of her message sink in, I began to realize for the first time what a terrible thing I had done and just how far I had drifted from an understanding of what matters most. I knew that I had to make some changes in my life. I don’t have space to tell you all that I did,