

From Section 2: Finding All We Need in God

*"Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord,
'You are my Lord; apart from you, I have no good thing.'" Psalm 16:1-2*

Why We Need to Seek God: **10 Encouragements for Pastors' Wives**

It's one thing to KNOW that we should seek God and HOW to seek God, and yet another TO seek God as we should and as we can. We read "Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him." Psalm 34:8. Yet sometimes we act like a kid being forced to eat Brussel sprouts (which most kids do not think taste good at all!). I'd like to turn up your spiritual taste buds by encouraging you with eleven very good reasons for pastors' wives to seek the Lord.

1. As We Seek Him, We Find Him and Eternal Life

God created us to know Him and be in relationship with Him. Everything about our lives is tied in Him. We do not exist without Him. And even though sometimes seeking after God feels so hard and even boring, and we may feel at times to be simply mouthing truths with cold hearts, the truth is, there is no one more wonderful to know than God. There is no one more fascinating than God. There is no one more enjoyable and fulfilling to know than God.

The desire to know God is actually the gift God gives to His people that is a means to a beginning: the beginning of eternal life, as Jesus says:

"Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."
John 17:3 ESV

It starts as He brings us to life by His Holy Spirit at conversion. It continues to grow within us throughout this life and all through the next:

"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world." John 17:24, ESV

And how glorious it will be to know and enjoy God then! The fact that God is infinite means that there will always be more of God to know and more, even deeper enjoyment to be had.

Think about the sweetest fellowship you've ever had with anyone. That intimacy is nothing compared to knowing God. Like Paul says, we see but in a glass to him lay, but one day, in heaven we will know him face-to-face and we will understand this fully. And there will be nothing boring about that at all! We will spend endless days basking in the reality that no one more wonderful to know than Him. The truest and deepest joy we can know in life is found only in God. Seeking God takes discipline, but it is the source of the only lasting happiness.

I love these two Jonathan Edward's quotes:
In the midst of his ministry:

"The happiness of the creature consists in rejoicing in God, by which also God is magnified and exalted."

From his death bed:

"And now God is in this room; I see Him, and oh, how unspeakably lovely and glorious does He appear –worthy of ten thousand thousand hearts, if we had them! He is here, and hears me pleasing with the creatures that He has made, whom He preserves, and loads with blessings..."

Yes, God created us to know Him and enjoy Him forever. And the wonderful thing is that loves to answer our seeking Him with finding:

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." –Jeremiah 29:13

Encouragement for Pastors' Wives

Every day is a great day to seek after God and enjoy His presence. But, when the trials mount, friends leave, church members continue to misunderstand or be discontent, or we mess up, it is even a BETTER day to remember that nothing will ever separate us from the love of God we have through Christ. He who is best is always there, and will never leave. Whether it's to seek His comfort or to look forward to the day when we will be with Him forever, enjoying Him and a world in which every trouble has vanished, He fills us up with Himself and gives us what we need to carry on.

2. As We Seek Him, He Changes Us to Reflect His Holiness

"Be holy as I am holy." -- Leviticus 19:2

"Holy", "godliness". These words may conjure up all sorts of rotten (untrue) stereotypes. Godliness is boring. Godliness is something for elite Christians who want to take their spirituality up a notch (such as pastors and their wives?) Godliness turns people into judgmental, brittle goody-goody's who think of themselves as better than others. Godliness is just a bunch of do's and don'ts and spoils all our fun. Godliness is how we act like on Sundays when we have our best game face on, but has very little to do with our everyday lives. Godliness is forcing yourself to choke down the book of Leviticus in a dry and lifeless quiet time.

But I've come to see that rather than being something ugly, harsh, bloodless, lifeless as the stereotypes might lead you to believe, true godliness is something extremely beautiful. It is a beautiful life that flows out from a beautiful heart, whose source is the MOST beautiful person with the MOST beautiful heart and the MOST beautiful life -- God, Himself.

It is loving what God loves, wanting what He wants, responding to the people and circumstances in our lives as He would. If you want to know what godliness looks like, there is no one better to look to than God and no better place than Scripture to understand what He is like and how He would have us reflect Him. There, He proclaims his character in his descriptions of himself, in the laws he sets up laws and in the promises he makes. There, he shows his character in how he deals with people and works in circumstances.

A deepening knowledge of God is not just a fulfilling relationship, but a fruitful one. We cannot help but be changed to be more like God as we grow nearer to Him in godliness. That's what the word godliness implies: reflecting the character of God. Godliness is us reflecting God, up to Him, out to others, and inward to our own hearts. It is loving what He loves, wanting what He wants, responding to the people and circumstances in our lives as He would. If you want to know what godliness looks like, there is no one better to look to than God, and no better place to look than Scripture to understand what He is like and how He would have us reflect Him. There, He proclaims his character in his descriptions of himself, in the laws he sets up laws and in the promises he makes. There, he shows his character in how he deals with people and works in circumstances. And most of all, there He shows Himself to us through Jesus, His perfect life lived and given to bring sinners to God.

As we seek God, He grows us into the likeness of His Son

"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." 2 Corinthians 3:18
He makes us like the moon which reflects the sun rays even in this dark world. "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."
Matthew 5:16

Encouragement for Pastors' Wives

The qualifications to be an elder/pastor/overseer include furnishing a godly example in how they live and in how they lead their local church. Pray that God would not only use his study of God's Word to preach well, but to continue to be transformed into the likeness of the Savior. Seek God, yourself, asking Him to make you a godly reflection alongside your husband, as a woman, a wife, a mother, and a member of your local church. NOT as a model of perfection, but a model of a humble woman being faithful do good to her husband, her kids, her church, and her God with her whole life. In this way, your life actually amplifies your husband's example. And we've found this to be such a great encouragement to others in the church, particularly those who were not raised in Christian homes.

3. As We Seek Him, We Learn to Depend on Him and Bear His Fruit

Ever since our first parents rebelled in the Garden, we humans have made independence our Plan A for life. But that Plan A self-reliance is just a fancy way of saying sinful rebellion when it comes to our relationship with God. We want to get things our own way, for our own purposes, for the glory of our own name. And the Plan B life of dependence upon Him, is actually exactly what God designed us for. We were made to survive and thrive through our fellowship with God.

Paul Miller, in his book The Praying Life, calls Jesus was the most dependent person to live. Miller reflects that dependence was no hardship for Jesus. This was right where He wanted to be and knew He was meant to be both as a human like us, and as the Son of God, living in complete, contented submission to the Father. And in being the most God-dependent person to ever live, Jesus was also the most God-trusting person to ever live. Dependence and trust go hand in hand. And where there is dependence and trust, there is perfect unity, perfect fellowship, perfect wonderfulness This was ETERNAL LIFE. Jesus knew that, lived that, and loved that.

In heaven, our dependence and trust upon God will be perfect like Jesus'. Our desire will be in perfect submission to God's and our fellowship with Him will be perfect, too. We will be one at last, and Jesus' prayer for us answered.

But we are not there, not yet. Our sin still seeks self-reliance. We love independence. We distrust relying on someone else, even when that someone else is Almighty God. And no surprise that our fellowship with Him is not like that which Jesus enjoyed. That is why it is so important for us to seek the Lord, as we pray, read His Word, and be encouraged by God's people. This is how we grow closer in fellowship to God and not enjoy Him more but be better able to do what He calls us to do.

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.... John 15: 4-6

Listen to that: it's the ones NOT abiding who get cast into the fire!

Encouragement for Pastors' Wives

If ministry is the life we are called to alongside our husbands, then dependence upon God is the air we need to breathe to live that life. When we are close to the Lord, we are far more likely to love better, live better, and counsel better. God can help us bear much fruit when we abide in Him. And not just any fruit, but the fruit of the Spirit that will help us respond like Him even in ministry hardship: extending forgiveness instead of bitterness. Showing love and kindness instead of vengefulness. Softening boldness with gentleness. Continuing in patient endurance in suffering. Bearing the fruit of joy in seemingly impossible circumstances, and the rare gift of self-control when tempted to sin.

But God doesn't stop there. Suddenly, Paul's language about fellowship of Christ's suffering makes sense. God's grace sufficient as His power is made perfect in our weakness. That's why Paul says when he is weak, that he is strong. Suffering is God's servant to draw us to Him and abide in Him. This is why Paul rejoiced in his weakness. Because God is always faithful, the hardships that force us to depend upon Him bear fruit themselves. Every hardship we have faced echoes this truth. There has never been a single time, in either our personal lives or in ministry to God's people in our local church, where God has not wasted a sorrow. He truly does work everything for our good and His glory. He truly uses each one to transform us into the likeness of Christ. And THIS redeeming of every trial serves to trust Him more and deepen our fellowship with Him. Amazing!

4. As We Seek God, He Straightens Out Our Tangled Thoughts and Circumstances

There is a way that seems right to man that leads to death. The heart is deceitful above all things. Hope deferred makes the heart sick. Those are just three truths from Scripture that show us why we should not simply "follow our heart" as the world tells us to. Even godly, mature Christians have times when their thoughts and the circumstances of life do not match up with what they thought God would do or should do.

A great example of this is Job, one of the most godly people who have ever lived. He looked at the great trials in his life and could not make sense of them. Neither could any of his counselors. THEY said God brought these difficulties on him as punishment for sin. HE didn't see what the sin was and wanted to bring his case before God to straighten the record. Neither Job nor his counselors had a category for what God was REALLY doing! He actually was allowing Job's suffering because Job was godly. And, here we are, thousands of years later, still learning to persevere through trials and confusing circumstances, trusting God's choices and plans for our good and His glory.

Don Carson has an excellent book on praying Scripture called, *Praying with Paul*. It has been a huge help to me to school my prayers for myself and others along the lines of Scripture. And at the same time, as my prayers have changed, I have found that God has used these very same truth-based prayers to filter out untruths about God that I have been tempted to believe.

Encouragement for Pastors' Wives

Most of Paul's encouragements are directed to the church. That makes them great things to pray for us, our husbands, and our churches. If you are ever at a loss to know what to pray for someone in your church, turn to Paul's epistles. And be ready to be pleasantly surprised at how praying these types of prayers are not only the kinds of prayers God loves to answer, but how He will use meditations of these verses to grow you.

5. As We Seek Him, We Pray with Confidence Because God Chose to Make Our Prayers a Powerful Part of His Sovereign Plans

Our prayers, whether they are short or long, feel effortless or belabored, are all powerful. Why? Because God has ordained them to be so! He has woven the fulfillment of His great plans for the world into the prayers of His people. They are actually part of the good works that God prepared in advance for His people to do. (Ephesians 2:10) Isn't that amazing! We seek after God, asking him to provide, knowing that he will because He is, by His choice, a prayer-answering God.

I don't know about you, but when I think of good works, I think of, well, get-your-hands-dirty good deeds. Prayer doesn't seem to fit the bill. But God clearly thinks differently from me on this matter. The New Testament alone has hundreds of accounts of God's people praying and commands for them to pray about a great number of different things.

When we seek God, He promises to work powerfully. James 5:16 says: "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." But does this mean that God is a divine vending machine who must dispense certain goods when His people push the right Scripture and prayer buttons? Do they give us power over God? No, but it DOES mean that God has chosen to weave our times with Him into the working out of His will.

We see this throughout the Bible. Did you know that Psalm 119 alone mentions more than one hundred blessings for those who study God's Word! Hebrews 4:12 tells us that God's Word is alive and active as it works in our hearts. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 we learn that God's Word is what equips us for every good work. In Isaiah 55:11, we are told that God's Word never returns void but always accomplishes His purposes. Do you see what this means? As we read God's Word, as we meditate and pray to God about what we read, and as we encourage one another with God's Word, God will be at work.

Understanding that God has ordained to do great things through the prayers of His people can help us to pray more. Perhaps you are in a dry season and prayer is particularly difficult now. Think about how many prayers of yours that God has answered even during this season. If He has ordained to do as much as He has during this dry season, can you imagine what He might have ordained to do if we were to pray more?

Encouragement for Pastors' Wives

We can fight to keep praying, remembering that God promises to powerful work through our prayers. No telling how our prayer-answering God may equip us for today and for the future through our prayers! No telling what ministry opportunities He may bring us or how He may choose to glorify Himself! This can help us to pray on!

We remind our husbands of God's plans to work through His people's prayers when they are discouraged. We can boldly pray for fruit from our husband's ministry, knowing that God has woven the fulfillment of His plans for even their ministry into the prayers of His people. This can encourage both us and our husbands to pray big and pray boldly for God's work through our husbands. Pray for powerful preaching, fruitful evangelism, growing knowledge, obedience and delight in God.

We can gather together, not just to chat, but to pray for each other. God gives His people far more than just a sympathetic ear to offer each other. He gives them to opportunity to intercede powerfully on their behalf, imploring their kind and generous Heavenly Father to care for their needs. God has woven the working out of His plans into the prayers of His people. Let's be a part of that working out! If someone shares their discouragement or needs with you, stop right where you are and take a moment to pray

about it. You will encourage them by your offer to pray, remind them that it is God who is Giver of all good things, as well as be at work already in asking God to work out His good plans in their lives.

And remember who this God is who is at work and promises to answer. He is the God who is all-knowing, all-powerful, all-wise. He can work in outside circumstances and inside hearts. He can rescue us as we pray and He can rescue someone on the other side of the world, as we pray. Your husband is in a difficult meeting with a church member. What can you do to help him? You can pray. You need more helpers to volunteer in Children's Ministry or money to make ends meet? You can pray. You have non-Christian friends sitting in the service, hearing God's Word and the gospel for the first time? You can pray! Some of your church's supported workers overseas are facing visa issues? You can pray.

There is no end to what this wonder-working God can do. Perhaps this is why praying is the only thing the Bible tells us to do without ceasing. There is no place you can't pray and nothing God cannot do, according to His perfect will and timing.

6. As We Seek Him, He Prepares Us for Difficulties that Will Come

Before the Day of Trouble

As we seek after God every day, not just in time of trouble, he prepares us for difficulties that will come. Like the house built on the rock, seeking after God now will be a means he uses to keep us standing through the storm. Weekend prayer warriors who generally pray only when times are tough we'll find ourselves to be weakened warriors. If we wait until we are struggling to strengthen our defenses, we will have a much bigger struggle.

That's why Paul and Ephesians 6 causes us to be disciplined and regularly prepare for the inevitable struggles. Ephesians 6:10-18 be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power pull on the full armor of God, so you can take your stand against the devil schemes. Etc. etc.. whether it's difficulties with others or lies or temptations that scheme against us from inside our very heart, seeking after God is the way God intends us to fight, endure, and even overcome through these trials.

In the Day of Trouble

We see in this psalm, David seeking God in a time of trial. Like David, there is nothing like a trial that sends me to my knees to cry out to God for help. Stripped of common graces and other good gifts of God, there seems to be nowhere else to go. God is seen for who he is: the giver of life, the sustainer of life, the omnipotent God who can rescue us and redeem any situation that we are in, even when all else looks impossible. Just as David said, when we see God, he can be our refuge. That is, not out of the storm, but protected from its fury. Not free from a sailing enemies, perhaps, but save from their harm. He will be our surrounding of strength.

Encouragement for Pastors' Wives

Satan is a smart enemy. He seeks to attack the weakest link...many times, sisters, that may be us! Like David, we need to have God as our refuge. How many times have I had my strongest battles right during Mark's sermon preparation or some other crucial time when it would be especially unhelpful for my husband to be distracted from ministry work! And how many times during troubles with church members (or in other areas of life) have I had to go to God for strength, not just to get through the day, but even the hour or moment, in order to fight off worry or bitterness or even hate.

Some things have been so hard that I simply did not think I could bear it. But God in His kindness always strengthened me for those situations through time with Him in prayer and in His Word. God will do the

same for you. I'm guessing He's done this for you already. God will always give us everything we need to be the wives of men in ministry. But we will not have good things apart from Him. It will only be by depending upon Him.

7. As We Seek God, He Equips Our Husbands to Equip the Church

"[Christ] gave some to be ... pastors... to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. --Ephesians 4: 7,11-13, CSB

Ephesians tells us that our pastor-husbands are Christ's gift to God's people. He gives them to God's people to equip God's people to help each other grow up to spiritual maturity. We have already seen from 1 Timothy 3 that this equipping includes:

- Furnishing a godly example in their personal lives and in how they pastor.
- Nourishing the church, equipping them through God's Word and their Christ-like leadership over God's people, and,
- Flourishing their families through their Christ-like leadership in the home.

But no one can equip unless they have been equipped themselves. There is no example to furnish, no food to nourish, no guide to flourish, unless our husbands, and us as their helpers, are equipped by the Lord. And while this equipping most definitely comes with special gifting, such as an ability to preach, it starts in a far more fundamental place: our growing knowledge and love for God.

If our husbands are to equip God's people to grow up into Christ, they must seek the Lord.

Shepherds Under the Good Shepherd

God often calls his people "sheep" and Himself, their "good shepherd". And what does He call our husbands? His under-shepherds. But what strange choices they are to be under-shepherds. For they are nothing but sheep, too! What an incredible task! For a sheep to take on the role of a shepherd, even just an under-shepherd! You would never see this in nature. That would be a ridiculous idea.

But here we see something not natural, but supernatural. Only the Lord would think up such a plan! And what difficult things our husbands are called to do for the sheep: love them, lead them, teach them, discipline. Protect them from enemies and even protect them from themselves. And no matter how fluffy and innocent they may seem, sheep (at least this kind of sheep) do bite! Only God can make our husbands be the under shepherds He calls them to be. This is why godliness is so needful.

Encouragement for Pastors' Wives

The number one most important thing your husband does for the church is to preach God's Word. Your husband may have attended seminary and learned many great tools to help him understand biblical passages, but it will be the Holy Spirit who gives him the insight into the truth and how to best apply it to his congregation. God knows His Word best, His people best, and the times best. He can give your husband the wisdom and insight He needs to faithfully teach His Word and to powerfully apply it to his congregation's lives. God can use us to help our husbands as they prepare to preach, and at the same time, grow you in godliness, and prepare you for any counsel you are asked to give.

8. As We Seek Him, We Have a Wonderful Opportunity to Undergird Our Husbands' Ministry Throughout the Day

We can support our husbands by praying for God to bless them in their callings to be godly men, husbands, fathers, leaders and as bold proclaimers of the truth...all things that are crucial for our husbands, as elders, to be, according to 1 Timothy and Titus.

In 2 Thessalonians 1, Paul tells us that God has chosen to sustain His people through their prayers for each other. We are closest to our husbands, and best informed of their struggles, strengths, and daily work. We can be some of the very best fighters for them and for the gospel. Sometimes I think this is the most powerful way that I help my husband. Heaven will tell.

Encouragement for Pastors' Wives

Pray the Schedule

I have found it useful to pray for Mark's meetings with church members or other pastoral staff, his personal time of prayer and Bible study, and his sermon prep time. His schedule has been a great "prayer guide" for his daily ministry. Then, at the end of the day, it's been encouraging to me to see how God helped him through his day. And, it's been encouraging to him to know that I've been supporting him with my prayers throughout the day.

Pray the Qualifications

Other times, I direct my prayers to the qualifications for overseers (pastors/elders) Paul lists in 1 Timothy 3: 1-7:

"Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap."

This is a great passage to meditate upon and to pray through for our husbands.

Pray the People: Regular, Deep Influencers

And sometimes, I pray for the people who Mark regularly disciples, works with, and who have input into his life. These are the people he has the most regular and deepest influence, and who have the most regular and deepest influence upon him.

Pray the People: The Care List

Our church has a care list that members who are struggling with great difficulty of some kind, whether it be health, jobs, sin struggles or something else that needs the special care and extra prayer of the pastor-elders and the church. These are frequently the people that the elders spend a high percentage of their time counseling and caring for. They may be the ones whose troubling situation requires great wisdom, difficult, but needed conversations, and other actions that are loving but not easy. They are also the ones who usually occupy the minds and even the time of our pastors the most.

Even if my husband might not have much direct contact with a particular person, his heart is weighed down with care for them. Praying for these people is good for these people as God comes to their aid directly. But it's also good to pray for them and for the pastors counseling them, that God might give them the wisdom and grace to care well for them. And, to entrust their ultimate well-being to God who can do all things.

These four ways of praying for our husbands are helpful by focusing on different aspects of his ministry.

9. As We Seek Him, He Uses Us Our Growth to Encourage Others to Seek God and Live for Him, Too

We also know from 1 Timothy 3 that our pastor-husbands are to furnish a godly example in who they lead and live. Seeking God in Bible study, prayer and the encouragement of God's people, are such important parts of being an example of how God transforms His people into His likeness.

The Example of a Work in Progress

Passages like 2 Corinthians 3:18 (And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.) Remind us that every Christian, this side of heaven, is in a work in progress. That means, that our husband/pastors do not only furnish a godly example by being like Christ, but also by being an example of being transformed to be like Christ.

As we seek God, we are encouraging fellow believers as they see how God HAS worked good in them, but how he we are a work of God in progress around so many other works of progress in our churches. Some of us are further along than others in our spiritual growth in Christ. But we all encourage one another as we seek after God.

There is an old restaurant, largely defunct now, called Fuddruckers that my family used to love. One of the things we loved most was the homemade hamburger buns—both the way they tasted and watching them made. The kitchen in which these buns were made was actually right next to the eating area. Instead of being closed off with regular walls, they used glass so customers could see the buns being made. You could see buns in every stage of their development to complete yummy buns, ready to have a hamburger slapped on them. From flour and yeast and salt and a bowl to the ball of dough, to the risen buns, to the beautifully brown, wonderfully smelling buns coming out of the oven.

Encouragement for Pastors' Wives

We know our husbands are supposed to be examples for the church, and one of the great things we can do for them is to ask God to grow His likeness in them. Our husbands teach not just by how they preach, but also by how they live. And our prayer-answer God can use our prayers for our husbands to continue to grow them for the encouragement of the church.

But what about pastors' wives? Scripture gives us very little particular "qualifications" but we know that a pastor's family is known by the church enough to discern if he does manage his family well. That cannot help but bring us into view as examples as we live under their leadership. But even without specific admonitions for pastors' wives, there are plenty of Bible passages that encourage us to build one another up and to help each other grow. On the basis of these, if nothing else, you will be an example to others in the church. And no matter where you are on the "spiritual maturity meter," you can be a great example to others. That's because the important thing is that you are faithfully pressing on to seek God and to be transformed into the likeness of His Son.

Like it or not, a pastor's wife tends to be a high-profile example to others in the congregation. Ask God to make you an encouragement to others as you seek after Him. You don't have to stand out like a spiritual superstar. And actually, being a plain ole, I am weak but He is strong, and a I am a sinner, but He is my Savior kind of woman is one of the most useful, most encouraging examples there are.

10. As We Seek Him, He Knits Us Together with Other Believers

What did Jesus pray for us in the Garden of Gethsemane right before He was crucified? That we would be one:

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. “--John 17:20-23

He wants us to have complete unity, why?

- To enjoy fellowship akin to what the Son and the Father enjoy (v.21)
- That the world may believe the Father sent Jesus.
- That the world might know that Jesus loved His people as God the Father has loved Jesus. (vs. 21-23)

The reasons can't get bigger than these!

And no wonder we need Jesus to pray this for us! We are all sinners, and there is every reason in the world for us to disagree with each other in our homes and in our churches.

We are male and female. We are old and young. We are introverts and extroverts. We may be experienced in some things, but we are always only learners in others. We come from different educational, cultural, and racial backgrounds. And most of all, we are all fallible, finite and sinful.

Yes, there is every reason in the world for us to live in disunity, and that is why it is such a God-glorifying thing for us to live in unity. The only unity the world knows is when everyone agrees with me. But the unity God's people can exhibit comes from God being our Lord and from us living in a way that shows that without God we have no good thing. We would rather set aside our own desires and preferences than live apart from God's will.

This unity is a tiny reflection of the fellowship of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three Persons, one God, three Persons working together to fulfill one will. And because God is purely holy and loving, the fellowship this unity brings in nothing short of Perfect Wonderfulness. God's plans for His people began and will end with us enjoying that Perfect Wonderfulness. Adam and Eve knew it with God and with each other before they rebelled. When Jesus brings the new heaven and earth, sin and death will be gone and we be enfolded into that Perfect Wonderfulness, all of God's people united as one, enjoying Him and each other perfectly and forever. Come, Lord Jesus, come!

That sounds wonderful, but how, can this be possible? We all know those passions that war within us and cause us to clash with our spouses and our fellow church members? Sometimes it seems impossible for Jesus' prayer for us to ever be answered. How can we ever “keep in step with the Spirit?” (Galatians 5:25) as God means us to so we can be who God wants us to be?

But this is why when God's people set aside their own personal desires and work together for God's will to be done, is such a powerful testimony to the Living God they love. Who but Him could do this impossible feat in this broken world of self-focused sinners! And by what means will He do this? By God working in us as we seek after Him. His Spirit transforming us as we pray to Him, as we study His Word, and as we encourage one another as God's people—the three “food groups” of seeking God.

Jesus wasn't the only one who had the unity of God's people on His heart. If there is one topic you can count on Paul covering in every letter he wrote to a church, it is the matter of unity.

In Philippians 2:1-8, Paul encourages the church at Philippi towards unity by following Christ's example of choosing what pleases God and what is in the best interest of the other, fellow believers:

"So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

There is only one way for us to be who God calls us to be: God must grow us into unity under his Son. We have to recognize the desires that war within us, in humility turn away from them, and with the grace God provides to submit ourselves to God, joining together to choose God's will over our own warring desires.

We've seen that this was the desire of David's heart:

"You are my Lord." David prayed in Psalm 16:2. – – My master. The one I belong to. The one I live to serve."

And this was the desire of Jesus' heart: "Not my will but your will," Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane—You, God, are the one whose will I choose to obey even if it's not what I want. Even if it's not what I think I want, because you know best.

But how can our hearts be more like David's and Jesus'? And how can people like us ever have hearts like God grow hearts full of warring desires into hearts that desire God's will most of all? It has to be God's work! The good news is, as James says

"[God] yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us... he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." James 5:7-8

God is jealous for our hearts; that is, He wants us to love Him most of all. And in humility, as we confess our warring desires to Him, we can count on Him to give us grace to keep fighting. God wants to do this work in us and we know that He is able. He has already called us, chosen us, saved us, filled us with His Spirit, and it's His promise to keep on transforming us until the day He takes us home and completes his work in us. No wonder Jesus prayed for our unity! What a great reassurance that God will bring it about! Philippians 2 tells us that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. What a wonderful day that will be!

But saying that Jesus is absolutely going to answer his prayers to bring us into unity, does not mean it's a snap-your-fingers kind of transformation. Actually, it's almost always a gradual process, and seeking God in prayer, with His Word, and for His people is a crucial part of how it happens. Through prayer, God transforms us and gives us grace to love one another as He desires. Through studying His Word, God unifies our thoughts about who He is and how He wants us to live. And as we seek God together, as a congregation, we pray together for the same good work to be done among us and He uses that to knit our hearts together.

Encouragement For Pastors' Wives

This is another reason why seeking after God is so important for us, as pastors' wives. We can help our husbands equip God's people to grow up into Christ, when we seek the Lord. "Make us one, as You are one with Christ!" is one of the most important requests we can pour before God. Ask God to help you both respond well to difficult situations in the church. Ask God to help your husband and you to fight against unity-breakers, like gossip, envy and unforgiveness. Unity can crumble in times of trials in the church; or, it can be strengthened as it fights against sin and responds with truth spoken in love. If I pray nothing else for our church and my husband every day, it needs to be a prayer to make us one, as Jesus prayed.

This side of heaven, there will continue to be a war of desires inside each of God's people. The new creation part of us longs for us to live in allegiance to God. But the old side of us still rebels. We fight within ourselves, and we fight with one another. Only by seeking God will through prayer, His Word and the help of God's people, will your husband be able to lead the local church towards the kind of love and unity God desires. Paul points to all three of these in his letter to the church in Colossae:

"And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." --Colossians 3:14-16

There have been times when my heart cannot seem to release bitterness, resentment, or unforgiveness towards others who have mistreated, misunderstood or maligned me, my husband, my family or our church. Like an invasive weed, the vines from these sinful attitudes entrap my heart and it feels like they will never let go. I have found that at times like these, the only power strong enough to free my heart is seeking the Lord. Only He can give me courage to speak truth in love when needed. Only He can help me to stop keeping a record of wrongs and forgive.

And even with His help, it is usually an over-and-over-and-over pattern of prayer I need. But God has always been faithful to answer, and in the process, He also seems to grow me to be quicker to forgive in the future. Go to Him with your heart's struggles against the members of your church. Ask Him to answer His prayers to make His people one by helping you forgive and keep on loving.

Questions for You

1. Have you ever done any of these 10 tips? How have they helped you? How has God used them to help your husband and/or the church?
2. Every season of life provides its own set of benefits and difficulties when it comes to seeking the Lord. What season are you in? What are the benefits and difficulties? How can you navigate those to best seek God and to best support your husband's ministry, as you seek God?
3. Any other ideas for how to weave supporting your husband's ministry into your seeking of the Lord?