

## **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*

### **Seeking God Makes Flourishing Our Family in the Ministry Possible**

*"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,  
and the two shall become one flesh." --Ephesians 5:31*

Let's take a look at Titus 1:6-9:

"An elder must be blameless, the husband of one wife, with faithful[c] children who are not accused of wildness or rebellion. As an overseer of God's household, he must be blameless, not arrogant, not hot-tempered, not an excessive drinker, not a bully, not greedy for money, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled, holding to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it."

There's a little word "blameless" in verse 6 and then again in verse 7 that makes something quite clear: godliness is a pre-requisite for their job. And, while we've already established that blameless does NOT mean perfect—that would only be Jesus—it does mean a consistent pattern that is seen and acknowledged by others. And where should these men found to blameless? In family, in life, in their biblical leadership.

They are to FLOURISH their families through their loving, wise leadership while at the same time, they FURNISH a godly example and NOURISH the church.

No wonder Paul says in 1 Timothy 3 "If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble work." This indeed is a noble task; that is, a task beyond and above. For while every Christian man is called to this kind of godliness in these very common Christian life attributes, men like our husbands who either are or who are aspiring to be a pastor/elder, are to be those who are seen to be models of these.

And doesn't this make sense? First of all, good leadership in the smaller scale of a family provides a hopeful indication of the ability to provide good leadership in the larger scale of the church. But also, leadership in the family provides a wonderful model to the rest of the congregation. Our husbands teach through how they lead and preach; but they also teach through their lives, including their family lives.

After all, every Christian husband is to love his wife like Christ loves the church and to raise his children in "the fear and admonition of the Lord." Every wife is to submit to his wise leadership and to do him good by helping him carry out those good decisions within the family. Our husbands, by caring well for us, cannot help but be someone who others in the church will look to as an example. Scripture gives them this model:

*"Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you." –Philippians 4:9*

### **Where You Lead, Will I Follow?**

You probably figured this out already, all of this has big implications for us, too. God gives our husbands His Spirit to be their Helper, but He gives them a very special earthly helper, too. Who is it? You got it... it's me and you! Our husbands are called to a "noble task" (1 Timothy 3:1) and so God gives them a wife of noble character to help them, not unlike the Proverbs 31 woman who is described as such (Proverbs 31:10, CSB).

Heard that phrase used to describe a biblical woman before? Yes, you have. That amazing Proverbs 31 wife. (Insert an "uh oh" here) But please don't freak out! I'm not about to launch into how you can DO everything that proverbial woman is described as doing to be your husband's helper. Actually, I'm really only pointing to what that woman is said to BE in her heart. It's the motives behind what she does that I'm talking about: that she fears the Lord (v.30), and that she seeks to do her husband good (v.12). Everything else in that passage are only examples that flow out of her love for God and her love for her husband.

THIS is the kind of heart behind the helpers God wants us to be to our husbands as they nourish the church, furnish a godly example, and flourish their families at the same time. Seeking God and growing in godliness is as important for what God calls us to do as it is to what He calls our husbands to do.

### **The Elephant in the Room**

Ok, let's talk about it. Is it hard for you to think about your life's goal is to do good to your husband? Why doesn't Proverbs 31 talk about what HE'S supposed to do for you?!

Does the six-letter word "submit" in Ephesians 5:22-24 feel like a nasty four-letter word to you?

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands." --Ephesians 5:22-24

If you struggle here, you may be helped by reading on to verses 25-30:

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." -- Ephesians 5:25-40

God is not calling us as wives to submit to abusive tyrants whose every selfish whim we are to meet. God is calling us to submit to men who are to spend their lives loving us sacrificially, cherishing us and building us up in Christ. Our submission, as verse 32 puts it, is to show respect for our husbands' loving work towards us.

And if we look back at verse 21, we see the ultimate reason for our husbands' loving leading and our respectful submission: to show reverence to Christ. Both of us are submitting to Him by living with each other this way.

## **Show Grace to One Another**

Our husbands may need lots of grace to lead in our home and in church, but we need lots of grace to respond to their leadership in a godly manner, too. We both need to show grace to each other. Most every day! Our sin, our inexperience, our personalities, and our pasts, present, and future, will mean that they lead us and we follow them imperfectly. We need to ask God for patience and forgiveness as much as the air we breathe. And we need to make honesty and encouragement the twin engines that help our husbands lead and help us submit in a way that glorifies God.

And lest you think submitting is a position of weakness, oh contraire! According to God's Word, our response to our leadership at home is an indication of the effectiveness of their leadership more broadly. We make a huge difference in if our husbands can be qualified and can stay qualified to be a pastor/elder. And, we are in a special position of impact upon the congregation as others look at us as an example of how God wants families to live. Sobering, but exciting

### **Questions for You**

1. What makes flourishing the family while nourishing the church so hard?
2. How has your husband's leadership in the family helped him as he has led your church?
3. How have you seen your husband improve in flourish your family?
4. How have you learned to show grace towards your husband as he leads you and your family?
5. Have you learned any ways to help learn how to better lead you without discouraging him?
6. Have you ever struggled with making your husband's good your aim? How has fearing the LORD helped you do this?
7. Have you ever struggled with feeling that submission is a position of weakness or less importance?

### **Shall We Dance?**

This two into one thing truly is miraculous work that God does in a Christian husband and wife. And to use yet another analogy, it is quite a bit like a clumsy couple learning to dance together. No, not the individualistic, arm-flailing, head-knocking, hiney-shaking that many couples do today, as fun as that might be. No particular coordination between dance partners is needed in that kind of "everyone does their own thing" moves.

No, I'm talking about ballroom dancing, such as waltzing. Two people trying to do something graceful together to music not of their own making. I should know. Mark and I have actually experienced both--- the clumsy couple on the physical ballroom dance floor, bumping into couples, stepping on each other's feet and trying to do some semblance of a rotating box step to the orchestra's peppy waltz music.

But far trickier than our waltzing attempts in college, were the bumps of marriage were hit in the early days of our marriage. (How is it that you can get to know someone over several years before getting married and somehow find that he/she seems to be a stranger when you are married?) Perhaps Mark and I had more shocks than the average couple, or perhaps it just felt that way. There were times when it seemed close to impossible for our two, very different selves to be one. There were so many differences in perspective, in habits, in preferences that I never imagined.

But there was one thing that was NOT different. One thing that pulled us through even the hardest, most discouraging days: the God we each knew and loved. We served the same Shepherd. We had the same Holy Spirit living in us. We believed His Word to be true; His ways to be good. His power to be even

infinite enough for our overwhelming struggles. We read His Word. We prayed (alone and together). We sought counsel. And God taught us and grew us through those days. By His work, two were very much becoming one. He brought the unity we increasingly enjoyed. Where would we have been without the Lord in the middle of our mess and our hearts? I shudder to think.

### **Leaving Behind the “Push-Me, Pull-You”**

If left to our own desires, we would have been like Dr. Doolittle’s Push-Me, Pull-You, a llama-looking creatures with a head on each end. With two heads, each pointed in the opposite direction, there’s always a tussle. One head desires to go one way, while the other desires to go the other. No one wants to feel like a tail-end. Everyone wants their way. Life is a constant tug of war and whoever has the most “umph” wins by dragging the other against their will.

“Choose your spouse carefully. See that you can make decisions together. The number one thing you will do in your marriage is that: making decisions together.” These were the wise and frankly, surprising advice that a godly man gave to those of us attending the Courtship and Marriage class at our church many years ago. There are many things people might think of that top the compatibility charts for couples: personality type, hobbies, number of children desired, career pursuits, etc., but I have to say that I think that teacher got it right: the number one thing we do with our spouse IS make decisions. If you can make good decisions together, everything else is gravy...maybe gravy with lumps, but nonetheless gravy. And where does the foundation come from to make good decisions? You guessed it: our love of God and the desire to live out His Word. Yup. Godliness.

Godliness, making God and what He wants the top priority in our marriage, transforms us, be it little bit by little bit, from a useless Push-Me, Pull-You to a powerful team of oxen, working together for the same cause: “Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

### **What do two lives being transformed by God look like? Christ and His Bride! And what flows out of making decisions God’s way? Beauty.**

We look like Christ and His bride, the Church, as God helps us do what we can never do on our own. As He helps us put our spouse first. As He helps us respond in love to each when we want to lash out or withhold forgiveness. As He helps us teach each other how to love each other. As He helps us to speak honestly about needs, but in love and with encouragement rather than expecting to be married to a mind-reader. As He prepares us for the storms and gives us strength to persevere. As He gives us humility to share with others and ask for their help. As He gives our husbands wisdom and as He grows our confidence in God’s use of them as His leaders in our lives.

God does this wonderful work as we “feed” on the good food that brings godliness: through our prayers, through our time in His Word, through the encouragement of other believers, and through the work of God’s Holy Spirit in our hearts, helping us to choose His ways over our own, as we practice them over and over and over again in daily life.

### **Finding Balance**

As I’m writing this, we have just clocked in our 44th year of marriage. By the Lord’s grace, the two, clumsy dance partners make one pretty good pair now after all these daily rehearsals that God has scheduled in our lives. And still, I would have to say, the number one thing we have had to do together is make decisions. And the number one thing that has helped us make those together is God’s work of godliness in us. Nowhere has this been truer than in finding a good balance between marriage/family and ministry.

As we've seen already, biblical requirements for our pastor/elder husbands make it quite clear that ministry isn't a "punch-my-timecard-in-at 9-and-punch-out-at-5" kind of life. This calling isn't one that simply depends upon a man's gifts to teach, but actually looks at their 24/7 life of godliness and care for their marriage/families to be qualified to become or to continue as a pastor/elder.

This means-ministry-shaped marriage is the life we are signing up for with our pastor-husbands. But this also means that while your marriage and family life will grow a heart for nourishing the flock, the comings and goings of that ministry will be shaped by the needs of your marriage/family that you might flourish, even as he is nourishing the church.

Right. Sounds like two halves of a pie: ministry pie and marriage/family pie. Put them together and you are all set. But, if you think that these two sides fit perfectly together tidily in one, little pie pan, you are in for quite a surprise. Marriage and ministry are a dance being learned by clumsy partners every bit as much as you and your husband might have been as you started out in marriage.

But this time, it feels less like a two-partnered waltz, and more like a hundred or even thousand-partnered bunny hop, that tries to accommodate all the members of your church as well as your spouse and your family! How in the world can we learn to choreograph this kind of life? It will take practice and patience. It will take the input of wise counsel. And it will most definitely take godliness.

Here are some of the best "dance steps" that Mark and I have learned through our years of marriage in ministry:

### **1. Seek God to Guide You**

Godliness is loving God and desiring to carry out His Word. It's not starting with what I want or what you want, but what God wants, knowing that will also be best for us. We do not have to be a Push Me, Pull You creature. We can go together to God's Word and see what He says.

God's Word tells us that a man is first called to be a godly man, a good husband and a good father. Without these attributes, he cannot even qualify to be a pastor. So... the shape of ministry should make room for time with the Lord, time to enrich your marriage, and time to teach and care for your children.

God's Word also tells us that a pastor is a man who is to have God's heart of love for the local church. He is to be a good under-shepherd, taking his cues from the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for the sheep. He will give his life to leading them well, through disciplining them, teaching them, praying for them, showing them hospitality and being an example for them in their own lives. Their marriages and family life will bear the impact and be an opportunity for ministry.

Knowing these two truths helps us look together at our lives and make good decisions that care for the family as well as the church. It will still be hard to make these two sides of life fit well together, but at least we know God's priorities and what to look for. Even if there aren't easy solutions, it helps to know what the goal is, to be encouraged that we agree upon that goal, and to strive for unity as we seek that goal.

### **2. Seek God to Grow in Patience**

Knowing a goal and getting to the finish line are two very different things. So it is with finding a good balance in marriage and ministry. Not only does it take a lot of time to learn how to juggle these two well, but it seems that marriage or ministry is always tossing in an extra ball to keep in the air. We might just be getting down what it is like to be a young, married couple in the ministry, only to add in a baby. We might have a workable, regular ministry schedule, when suddenly there's a crisis that requires a lot more time. Etc. etc. Our little plans are upset and our lives stumble out of balance.

These difficulties could put us at odds with each other. But with God's help, we can show patience with each other as we make our way to a new balance. We can see these changes as coming from God's hand and see each other as partners to help each other adjust to them. We can trust in God's sovereignty, take confidence in His provision, seek His wise counsel through His Word and His people.

Godliness is the trunk of the tree for our lives in ministry and in marriage. Its roots stretch down into God and His Word. From such nutrients, God can grow your two into one, and make that one bear much fruit, no matter what the season or how the storms may blow.

"Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers." – Psalm 1:1

### **3. Four Great Prayers for Godliness in Your Marriage**

- Ask God to continue to grow your attraction to each other even as beauty fades with age; solidify your vows of commitment to each other no matter what difficulties may try to pull you apart; extend your faithfulness to each other daily, persevering in love to the end of life; and expand your graciousness towards each other even when hurt or wronged (Mark's four recommendations from his CHBC wedding sermon.) Each of these are highlighted in Ephesians 4 and Christ's love for the Church. They are wonderful reflections of His love in our marriages.
- Ask God to knit you together by your love for Him and His will. Ask Him to make your joint love for Him to be the cornerstone of your marriage and the deciding factor in your treatment of each other and the plans for your life together. Ask Him to make you partners in the gospel, as displayed in your hearts, your lives, your home, and at church.
- Ask God to give you good, believing friends to share honestly about your marriage and humble hearts to hear their advice. Ask God to make you and your spouse good friends who can share honestly with each other and humble hearts to hear each other's advice.
- Ask God to give you eyes quick to see good, mouths filled with encouragement, minds that record acts of kindness, hearts filled with gratitude, and hands ready to out-do each other in service towards each other.

### **4. Four great things to remember as you seek unity in your marriage:**

- Your spouse is different from you. A different sex. A different frame. A different personality. A different past. A different set of strengths and weakness. Don't expect him to see life just like you. Don't expect him to struggle with the same things as you. Don't expect him to be a mind-reader. Don't expect your spouse to know your needs or likes/dislikes without you communicating them.

And even when you tell him, don't expect it to be a "once-and-done" thing. It takes time. Sometimes a lifetime. You and your husband will always be a learner about each other. Always. It is a little picture of the way we will always learn more about God through all of eternity. It can be frustrating, but it **\*\*helps** to think of it as exploration of a new land, acquiring a new language.

- Do not assign (your own) motives to your spouse's actions. There are often more than one reason for saying or doing something. Many times our spouse does something unhelpful out of ignorance or novice-ness. Rarely is outright maliciousness the cause, but it can be tempting to assume it is. So much

hurt can be avoided by trying to understand each other's action before reacting.

- Everyone hears better with encouragement. Make it your business to catch your spouse doing good things and thanking him for them, especially in areas he is weak. When you do bring up something difficult, try to also tell him things you appreciate or ways you see him growing in the area of weakness. Encouragement puts you on the same team and helps to lower defensiveness and set a better context for what you have to say.
- Your spouse is no replacement for your God. You will always be married to a sinner. You will always be married to someone who can only meet a portion of some of your needs. He will never know you or love you as well as God does. Appreciate the good gift he is, but don't expect him to provide for you what only God can.

### **5. Four great things to put in place ahead of time for your marriage:**

- A designated, go-to couple you both respect to help you through difficulties. Similarly, this is designating a couple ahead of time so that when you come to a difficulty, you don't have to work through finding a suitable couple. Ideally, this is a couple a bit older than you who can bring perspective of years to your impasse.
- Regular check in's. Whether this be once a year or once a week or something in between, set up times to take inventory of aspects of your marriage that you are working on. And don't just set a date for these, but set goals for these times. Such as ways you have seen each other grow as well as ways you might still need to improve. Make these times of encouragement in any way possible for the points of criticism to be well received.
- Date nights Don't coast on good times past. Build upon them. Set aside regular couple time to enjoy each other and grow your relationship. You don't have to spend money to have a date, but you do have to spend time.
- Look out for transitions. Expect life to get bumpy whenever you go through a big transition. A new job. A new baby. A move. A change in health. etc. You may have a wonderful "system" for marital bliss only to see the whole thing upset by a transition. Recognize transitions as times of relational overhauls and work together to find a new balance. Acknowledge that it will take time to adjust and partner together to help each other get to a new healthy pattern for normal.

### **6. Four great things to remember as you make decisions, especially when trying to balance marriage/family and ministry:**

- Find the Good: What good things are we trying to do? What are the worthy benefits of each choice you are deciding among... to ministry to marriage/family life, particularly the good in the other person's favored option?
- Filter through Desires: Are we looking at this decision as my desire versus your desire? If so, what is the desire each of you are hoping to fulfil? How can you respect these desires and care for each other?
- Facilitate Agreement: Can we take the good we see in each option and find a solution that includes the best from both? Which option most closely fits our shared vision for flourishing the family while nourishing the church? How can we be on the same team over this matter?

- **Feed Well:** Does God's Word shed light on this topic? Have we prayed about this? Is there anyone among God's people who might give us helpful counsel? And if there is no specific counsel on this point of decision, what general principles of loving each other and leadership in family that can help us make this decision? What in the character of God and the trustworthiness of His Word can give us confidence that He will help us make a good decision?

One wise friend once said, "The number one thing you will do with your spouse is make decisions." How very true, especially in the ministry. Not only are you making decisions that are good for the two of you, or for your whole family, but you are constantly making decisions about how much to sacrifice in your family life for the good of the gospel/your local church. We know from 1 Timothy 3 that pastors are not just to NOURISH the church, but also at the same time, FLOURISH their family. And, since both family needs and church needs are constantly changing, that leaves you and your husband needing to make a lot of decisions to keep everything in good and healthy balance.

The Devers, now at 40+ years in ministry, have begun to get better at balancing things, but still, we have much to learn. But I'm so grateful that our difficulties largely stem from not properly estimating how much time various ministry opportunities really require, NOT a disunity over what God would have us do. I have to chalk this up to continually seeking the Lord and Him kindly giving us united hearts in our love for Him and His people.

If there are two things that will trip up a family in ministry life they are: not being in unity about God's priorities and not living out those priorities. As we seek God in prayer and Bible study, He teaches us and transforms us, our unity with our spouse grows and we come to unity more easily. As we seek the biblical counsel of God's people (especially other, more seasoned pastors and their wives), God grows us in unity that helps us better balance family and ministry.

I can't overstate how important unity has been in our ministry life! It's so easy to be like Dr. Doolittle's Push-Me, Pull-You as you and your husband navigate the clamoring needs/desires of your family and your church family. Looking together, growing together, being transformed together, helps align your vision and make the best decisions that both nourish the church and flourish the family, and choosing the best places for the sacrifices that you will need to make for this to happen.

### **Show Grace**

Our husbands may need lots of grace to lead in our home and in church, but we need lots of grace to respond to their leadership in a godly manner, too. We both need to show grace to each other.. most every day! Our sin, our inexperience, our personalities, and our pasts, present, and future, will mean that they lead us and we follow them imperfectly. We need to ask God for patience and forgiveness as much as the air we breathe. And we need to make honesty and encouragement the twin engines that help our husbands lead and help us submit in a way that glorifies God.

### **Questions for you**

1. What areas of the balance between marriage and ministry have you and your husband had to worked hardest to find unity?
2. How has seeking God and growing in godliness helped you and your husband find unity in decisions?
3. How has prayer, God's Word, and God's people specifically helped you do this?
4. Any words of wisdom about how you and your husband have learned to grow in unity that might be helpful to share with others?