

From Section 3: Delighting in God's People

*"As for the saints who are in the land,
they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight." Psalm 16:3*

Finding and Choosing Friends

We've already seen that, like David, God gives us very good reasons to love and appreciate "all the saints in the land" a.k.a. all the members at our church. We know that they are all the holy ones, the glorious ones, because Christ has died for them and made them so. We know that God calls us to love and delight them all for that reason, if none other.

However, we cannot help but note as we read the account of David's life that God gave David friends, helpers, teachers, and supporters to help him lead and persevere through the calling God gave him. Let's take a look at these categories of people in David's life, and as we do, let's consider who God has brought or we can ask God to bring into our lives as good gifts like these people, too.

David's Mighty Men

David's mighty men were his courageous comrades who were ready to risk it all for David's cause. In the early days, they were a band of renegades who were willing to join David out in the wilderness as Saul was chasing him down. They knew he was the Lord's anointed. To be allegiant to David's cause, would be allegiant to the Lord's cause, too. Later, when David came to the throne, they continued on to fight alongside of him in battle after battle. There is nothing they would not risk!

Our Husbands' "Mighty Men" --Elders and Deacons

I guess the closest to David's mighty men would be the elders and deacons who serve alongside our husbands. Let's think about each of those groups and why they are a delight to our husbands and also to us as we support our husbands in the ministry.

Elders are the godly men who teach and shepherd the congregation alongside our husbands, either as staff pastors or lay elders. These godly men are called by God and recognized by the congregation as their loving, caring under shepherds. These men teach them God's word, give them wise counsel, and build them up in prayer. They may teach from the pulpit, in classrooms, small groups or other settings. They meet together regularly to pray for the congregation, to discuss the spiritual well-being of the members, and together think through how to care for particularly difficult situations among the members. Their hearts are focused on loving well the members and helping them grow spiritually, for their good and to the glory of God.

At our church, CHBC, the elders have bi-weekly meetings to pray, get updates on members, and to think through how to care for members going through especially difficult times as well as think through issues that are coming up in the church, such as divorce, gender issues, or the role of women in the church. If there's big issues that the church at large is having to think through, the elders want to be thinking through these issues themselves, so they know how to best counsel the membership and in a unified way.

Though some churches use the word "deacon" to describe what is really the position of elder. The New Testament uses the word "deacon" to apply to godly men (and even women) who are called by God and recognized by the local church to care for the physical needs of church members. Stephen and

Phoebe are two examples of deacons/deaconesses in the New Testament. At our church, deacons in this sense, have different spheres of care. We have deacons recognized to serve our the physical needs of our members in everything from helping those having weddings to being in charge of finding volunteers to run the soundboard for the services to coordinating hospitality Sunday mornings to coordinating meals for those in need such as the sick and those who have just had babies, to name a few.

These cheerfully serving people can be some of the most delightful saints to both our husbands as pastors, and to us as their wives. Elders bear the load of teaching and looking after the spiritual needs of the members. They provide a safe, confidential, godly group of men to discuss weighty matters in our church and help our husbands make good decisions for the whole church. They provide a solid base for the church so that when our husband goes on vacation, or sabbatical, or even leaves the church for a different position, he knows the elders stay and continue to care well for the membership. They provide our husbands with an ear to hear some of the very difficult things that members are going through.

This has been especially important for me. I am a very empathetic person, and I can be very upset for a very long time and unhelpful way with some of the things that my husband has to bear. Elders have provided a much better, stronger set of shoulders to help Mark bear more of the load that he has had to bear. Elders, also, are in a good position to hear my own husband's need, and even our family's needs, that might not be as appropriate for the general congregation. Or might not be as understood by the general congregation.

A perfect example of this is when a sensitive matter is brought up in a members' meeting that involves sin or a disagreement among members. There are certain things about that sin or disagreement that are not shared out of sensitivity to the parties involved. The congregation then gets upset with my husband because with the information they have it looks like he has mistreated the members involved. When the truth is, he's choosing to personally take the hit to protect those members. How wonderful it is to have elders at times like those who understand the full picture and can encourage my husband in the self-sacrificial choice he made the congregation does not see.

Also, for me as a pastor's wife, I am so grateful to these elders to be my husband's friends to speak into his life and to hold each other accountable, and to pray for each other. It's not that non-elders can't do this, it's just that elders, given their shared responsibility and calling before the Lord, are particularly well-equipped to do this. Also, it's often among the wives of those pastors that I find some of my closest friends. Again, it's not that I don't have friends among the other members of the church. I have plenty! It's just those elders' wives and I share a common perspective, common deeper knowledge of the difficulties as well as the triumphs of the members in the church, simply because of our common proximity to our husbands the church's elders.

Pray for the Lord to raise up godly men who can serve as elders alongside your husband. Pray for these men to lead in unity and godliness. Godly men can nonetheless be men of different opinion. It is a work of the Spirit to help these men come to agreement. Pray for them to encourage one another. Praying for their elders' meetings can be a great way to support your husband and these fellow under-shepherds. And pray for their friendships, not just their decision-making for the church. Ask God to use these men to help them grow in godliness and love and guide their families well, in addition to loving and guiding the church well. Pray for them to have wisdom to know how to balance their families' needs and the church families' needs.

Deacons have also been some of my husband's "mighty men" (and women), too. Like in the New Testament our deacon/deaconesses focus on the physical needs of members, so that my husband and the other pastors can focus more of their time on the spiritual needs of the congregation. But it's these men and women, by what they do in service to the church, who really do a lot to help disciple the church in living this out. Not only is this a huge load off of our husbands, but the church thrives as more members are actively seeking the well-being of others.

Deacons have also been a great encouragement to me and the other pastors' wives. Even with deacons/deaconesses in place, pastors' families (and especially pastors' wives) do much deacon-like caring of church members. And that's good! Good teaching combined with loving hands is a beautiful reflection of Christ. But when a church has deacons, many hands not only make lighter work, but it they magnify the reflection of Christ many times over. And they have helped keep our pastors' families from being overstretched in ways they were never meant to handle. Not to mention the many times when we have been the recipient of much support when we've needed it and meals when I've been sick! The Body of Christ is not a single-celled organism! It's many men and women serving the needs of the whole church.

Pray for the Lord to raise up many deacons in your church. Pray for these deacons to use their energy to build up and care for the church. And, to gather other members on their service teams to grow the church's ability to care well for all. Pray for their godliness combined with their service to be a clear reflection of Christ-likeness not only to your members, but to the world that watches. "They will know that you are my disciples by your love for one another."

Thank God for these elders and deacons. What a lot of aid they are to your whole family as they care for the whole church! Send them a note of thanks or stop them as you pass them in the hallway at church. Thank them for their service. Tell them that you are praying for them. Share with them a way you or another member has been helped by what they do. They will be encouraged that you noticed and are grateful for them.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. Does your church have elders and deacons?
2. How have these leaders provided support to your husband and to you?
3. How have you seen them help your church thrive?

Special Friends 1: Jonathan --Beloved, Self-Sacrificial Friends

Jonathan and David's close friendship was forged the day Jonathan watched David stand up against Goliath in a battle for the honor of the Lord's name, against all odds. Here's what the Bible tells happened:

"As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.... Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt." --1 Samuel 18:1, 3 – 4

How very different young David was from Jonathan's father, King Saul! King Saul, Jonathan's father, had stood there for days listening to Goliath's taunts and curses and would do nothing to defend the Lord's honor. But young David shows up on the scene and is enraged that the Lord's name would be treated thus. So, with no armor of any kind, and seemingly no thought of his own ability to protect his own life, David immediately challenged the giant. David depended on the Lord's strength and the Lord did not disappoint. With one stone, David downed the giant, slew him, and won the victory for God's people.

Jonathan admired David's courage and love of the Lord. No wonder he made a solemn promise of friendship with David right on the spot, and made it clear exactly what that friendship meant in his presents. His princely robe: David would be an equal, a brother. His armor, sword, bow and belt: he promised David his protection and provision. Jonathan was telling David that he would be his faithful, sacrificial friend.

David received these presents and reciprocated the friendship. Both Jonathan and David fulfilled their every promise to each other. Not only did they enjoy honest friendship and good fellowship together, but Jonathan would be instrumental in saving David's life from his father's murderous attempts. He recognized David as his father's successor and the king of God's choice, when most princes might have tried to keep the throne to be their own inheritance. After Jonathan and Saul had died and David took the throne as king, he searched out Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth. Most kings would have killed this heir to Saul's throne, but not David. He brought to live at his court in a place of honor. Yet another sign of David's and Jonathan's true friendship that carried them both through trials and lasted a lifetime.

"Pastors and pastors' wives can't have friends in the church," is an all-too-common remark we've heard. "It's unwise"—say some seasoned ministry families. "It's unfair"—say some church members. But Mark and I have found that we can have our "Jonathan's." And instead of being harmful for the church, they actually are very helpful, though they need to be chosen with care, and thoughtfully enjoyed to avoid provoking unnecessary envy.

Choosing Friends

Pastors and pastors' wives do need to show care as they build friendships within the church. On the most basic level, they should seek to be friends with everyone in the church.

In our church covenant, like covenants of many other churches, we promise to:

"... work and pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We will walk together brotherly love, as becomes the members of the Christian church; exercise an affectionate care and watchfulness over each other and faithfully admonish any treat one another as occasion may require. We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, nor neglect to pray for ourselves and others. We will endeavor to bring up such as may at any time be under our care, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and by a pure and loving example to seek the salvation of her family and friends. We will rejoice at each other's happiness and dapper with tenderness and sympathy to bear each other's burdens sorrows...."

These promises help us to know what it means to urge each other on in love in godliness. This is the culture of discipleship and love that we hope will be a part of every relationship we have with every member in the church. But the depth of friendship and the level of discipleship that takes place between every member in the church will vary greatly. It's a part of life. It's a part of God's plan. And just because our sinful hearts struggle because of the differences in the number of friends or kinds of friends someone has compared to us (or we might have compared them), that doesn't mean we shouldn't pursue and enjoy good friendships.

Every once in a while, someone comes along, and you are immediately good friends. But many times, friendship grows level by level. And with pastors and pastors' wives this is prudent because there can be many reasons, not all good, for people wanting to get close to you. I think making new friends is not that different from dating. I get to know them gradually, sharing more of my life and learning more about

them. Depending on how our time together goes, the friendship deepens, or sometimes it just stays casually friendly. Here are some typical levels of friendships and how to grow your friendships through them.

1. Simple, but Deliberate, Friendliness and Care

That can look like everything from a how are you and how can I pray for you as you're talking to the person next to you after the church service is finished to praying for church members from your directory if your church has one (and I would heartily encourage you your church to have one! They are a great tool!). Our church is even gone as far as laying out a suggested schedule that shows you how to pray through everyone in a month.

Depending on how large your church is, you might get pretty good at knowing everyone's name, especially if you regularly pray through the directory. I'm someone who's only so-so with remembering names. This seems especially embarrassing to me, as pastor's wife, where I still fight my own expectation that I should know every member's name off the top of my head. I worry that someone will feel uncared for or that I've not done my job if I don't know their name.

But perhaps God will use my fumbling memory to show that I'm just a plain ordinary person like the rest of the congregation, knowing some of the names of the people in our 900 member church, and not remembering others. And perhaps, if I'm willing to humbly admit that, and I still go on and ask them their name again and ask how they are and how I can pray for them, I'm able to show an affectionate care even though I am imperfect... just like them. That's not such a bad model after all, is it?

2. Friendships Grown through Serving Together

I have found many of my friends at our church by serving alongside them in one ministry or another. In my case is usually children's ministry or music. There is nothing like the hours spent prepping, serving, debriefing to give you a chance to grow in your knowledge of each other and opportunities to love each other on a deeper level.

No ministry I have ever been a part of has ever come without some sort of difficulty arising at some point in time. And while difficulties are not fun, even they are a great way for us to urge each other to be closer to the Lord and to support each other in the process. It deepens our friendships, grows our affectionate care of each other, and models to each other godliness, just as we have covenant did to do.

Serving alongside others is always a great way to make and deepen friendships. And as you serve, you may even meet a woman who is a future "Jonathan" in your life.

3. Friendship through Hospitality

There's nothing like having others over for a meal at your house is a chance to get to know them better. Home says something about you and often provides a much more open environment to share more deeply about your life with someone else. Whether it's you having another woman over for coffee, or your husband inviting a guy over to sit on the porch and talk for a while (in our case it's sitting in rockers on the back parking lot, next to the dumpsters., ah, city life!), Friendships grow in one to one time like this.

Having other couples over for dinner has been a great way for us to not just make individual friendships, but to grow couple friendships. I love friendships with my individual girlfriends! Mark loves his friendship with his individual guy friends. But there's something very special about couple friendships. There is a richness and a depth as you get to know not just a single person, but them in the context of their

marriage. Not only is this just so fun, but when you go through difficulties – – marital difficulties, children's difficulties – – it is nice to know you have a man and wife who knows you and your husband as man and wife and you can talk to about those things. And those difficulties will come and you will need those friends!

4. Friendships Grown through Pastoring Together

as I mentioned in the section on mighty men, I have found many of my closest friends to be among the pastors and elders' wives at our church. And a lot of times, those closest friends or the wives of the men among the pastors and elders who wind up being my husband's closest friends. Because we become privy to sensitive matters that are not commonly known within the church family, other pastors and elders wives can be friends who we can talk to about even these issues, just like for our husbands, their fellow pastors and elders are especially good for them to talk to about these things.

I'm not talking about being exclusive club made up of an elite group with a secret handshake and feelings of self-importance. I'm talking about those who we can go to to receive comfort and advice about matters that the pastors have deemed should remain with them and those members involved for the good of the church.

Does this mean there's something wrong with me if I am not best friends with some of the other pastors' wives or elders' wives? No, it does not! We are all different. We will all form different friendships. We always want to make the best of whatever kind of friendship we can have with someone, whether pastor's wife or not.

Here at CHBC, there are some pastors' wives I'm really close to and there's others that I have rarely even talk to. Remember: we are not the second-tier Board of Directors only behind our husbands. They are on staff at the church. We support them in their ministry. We are not required to be best friends with every one of the other pastors' wives. Our husbands can be great advisors to us in coming to a good balance between encouraging each other as pastors' wives as opportunities present and feeling free to not deepen yet another relationship because there's just not time for everything else (or some other reason) that they want us to prioritize as we support them.

But, because these friendships can be so rich, planning regular get-togethers that suit everyone's busy schedules can be so rewarding. Because we have two semesters of internship programs at our church each year, we plan our get-togethers so that each intern class can meet up with the intern scratch that with the elder/pastor's wives four times each semester. We spend time enjoying conversation, sharing prayer requests, and choosing a topic that will encourage us as wives of men in ministry. It's these regular meetings that this book is springing from.

We always have wives that are new to this role and wives who have been in this role for many years. The sharing of wisdom in the time of prayer and talking is invaluable. And whether it includes wives who have become some of our very good friends are wise we hardly know we all grow together during these times.

5. Getting to Jonathan

It's in this process of moving from basic friendship, to friendship through activity, to friendship when meeting with other pastors' wives, and friendship through hospitality, that Mark and I both have fairly successfully been able to find Jonathan's.

It takes time. It takes observation. It takes prayer. It takes life. And it takes some risks. I am so grateful for the handfuls of Jonathan's that I have gotten to know over these past three decades here at CHBC. Their loyal, self-sacrificial friendship has been some of the strongest, deepest, undergirding the Lord has given both of us. The Lord has used these people to help us whether all the storms that we've been through. We are so grateful for them.

6. Oops, Not Quite Jonathan

But if you get the idea that this four-step plan always leads to success, you would be wrong. There have not been many times, but there have been a few times when Mark or I have misjudged someone. As it turned out, they were more curiosity seekers than true friends. This can really hurt and spread gossip about our family.

How can you avoid these false friendships? Be slow and careful in what you share about your husband and family at first. Pray that God will show you who might be a friend you can trust to share deeply with. Pray that in all your friendships, old or new, that God would help you be humble, careful with your speech, and remember that you are always living before the Lord. Then, even if someone turns out to be untrustworthy, what do they have to say about you that you would not want known?

Forgiveness is so hard in times like this, whether it's you needing to ask forgiveness for sharing something in a way that was not God-honoring, or you confronting the person who was not careful with what you shared. I find it's only by God's grace that I have strength to do either one of these things. It's far easier just to hold in the unforgiveness and remain bitter to that person.

Beg God to give you a 1 Corinthians 13 heart of love for others! Something else that helps me with fighting hardness of heart is I try to remember that I am a sinner just like that other person. I can't put them in a separate "box" from me. My box being the perfect box and their box being the center box. No, we are both sinners. So, I can have compassion because I want to be shown compassion. And I can hold out forgiveness because God and many of his people have held out their forgiveness to me, many times.

7. Modesty in Honesty

Whatever level of friendship we enjoyed with someone, it should always be one characterized by honesty. But does that mean that if somebody asks the question that we always answer it to the fullest extent, no matter who they are or how well I know them? No, it does not. This is what I call modesty in honesty. We never lie, but we need to be wise in our sharing with others. The more we know about their spiritual maturity, their tendency towards weaknesses like gossip or worry, what would encourage them or discourage them, the more we can make a good decision about what to share.

Typically, I'm going to share more deeply with people who I know better because I want to make sure that I am building them up with my words. Sometimes members come up to me and ask me things about situations or people that only my husband knows. Or perhaps it's something I know about, but I'm not sure what's the best way to talk to them about that delicate subject. I use that as an opportunity to smile and say, "I know I'm married to your pastor, but there's many things that you just need to ask him. He's very careful with what he shares with me at a love for me and out of love for all of you in the church. Not a pastor. Just a pastor's wife here."

8. Biblical Counselor as Friend

God's word applied to God's people by the power of the Holy Spirit is an incredibly powerful tool! As we disciple each other in friendship, we can help each other turn away from sin, find comfort in God, and grow in Christ likeness. But there have been times when I am dealing with issues that need extra help. And there's times when people come to me hoping that our friendship will be the atmosphere in which they can grow and change as God wants them to.

But sometimes friendship alone is not enough. It's important to know when the water is too deep to go alone and when you or a friend would be helped by seeing a professional biblical counselor. A very clear example of that would be if someone is sharing what seem to be suicidal thoughts with you. Your friend needs more help than you can provide at a time like that. But even if your friend is not all the way at the top of the scale with suicidal thoughts, there are many times when it is helpful to recommend them seeing a biblical counselor. Their experience may be just what your friend needs to help them change and grow.

Perhaps you're okay with telling someone else to go to a biblical counselor, but when it comes to you or your husband, this all sounds a bit too embarrassing. Your husband's a pastor; you're a pastor's wife. Aren't you supposed to have your act all together? If God's Word is not enough for you, then who is it enough for? But I can tell you that those in the words of pride. Remember: you are a plain old person! You have hurts and wounds that may need special help.

Don't be embarrassed! Go get extra help! I have had multiple seasons where I have seen a biblical counselor on a regular basis. I have even had multiple seasons when I needed to go on anxiety medicine. {Actually, it's sitting in my purse right now! }Anxiety is a big fight for me. God's Word helps me. My friends help me. My husband helps me. And sometimes seeing a biblical counselor helps me. But always, God has used my need, and my weakness, to learn to rely more on his strength and to be encouragement to others who may struggle to.

9. Caring for Others as We Enjoy Our Friends

While it is absolutely a good thing we have friends, close friends. We also absolutely need to be careful of others' feelings as we build and enjoy those friendships. In most churches there are usually more people would like to get to know you better and have you for a friend than you have time for. You are finite. You are not a one-woman friendship machine. There are other obligations in your life. There will be decisions you have to make about who you spend time with and how much time.

And yes, chances are there will be people who you disappoint because you never become that deeper friend that they are hoping you would be. (I even had one woman leave the church because I was not her friend.) It is right to enjoy your friends. It is not a bad thing for others to learn to let you have friends and that those friends might not include them. Just like is not a bad thing for you to learn that when you would like to be a close friend of someone and you're not.

However, friends are a much more public thing in a church on Sundays. And on social media on Mondays through Saturdays. In both of those settings I try to be sensitive to others. I'm not going to post on social media me hanging out with a bunch of friends at a restaurant in case that heightens someone else's sense of loneliness or temptation to envy.

At church, I try to spend more of my time talking to people who I don't regularly see, whether they are visitors, members I don't know very well or don't get to see very often. I don't try to avoid my friends. I don't try to act like they're not my friends. I just know with them I'm going to have time with them

outside of the church building so I'm going to prioritize friendship with those who I won't get to see like that. This is another aspect of being a good steward of our closest friendships -- being sensitive that to the best of our ability they don't hurt others by accident.

10. Hugging a Parade

CHBC is in Washington DC. Washington DC is an extremely transient city. Military people come and go every three years. Government people come and go every 2 to 4 years, a lesser doing an internship and that could be even less than a year. It's a very expensive city with not the best public-school system. So even those who are moving away because of a job, may be moving out into the suburbs for lower cost of living and better schooling for free.

Our church is reflective of our city and these church plants. One-third of our membership turns over every three years. Members are encouraged to dive right in and get deeply involved in the church and deeply involved in each other's lives. This is part of what makes our community so rich in their love and care for each other. But it is hard to invest so much in each other only to see a for sale sign outside their house in just a few years.

Not only is it so hard, but it hurts. Every time one of my close friends leave, it's like they take part of my heart with them. That's why my husband came up with the motto "hugging a parade." Because we meet to part, especially here in Washington DC. Sometimes the thought of having to grow through the motion of finding new friends, growing their friendship, and getting to Jonathan yet again is exhausting.

Sometimes I think I just can't do it again. I'd rather be lonely than feel the pain of losing someone else again. This takes God's unchanging, infinite love. Good thing He is so powerful. Good thing He is so able. He always gives more grace to go deep and to find Jonathan again. And I think as He calls us to do that, He expands our ability to love like Him. And, He reminds us of the finiteness of this world. He holds out to us the hope of the eternal home coming where those who we met to part with will become those who we enjoy the fellowship of forever with. And there will be no parting anymore.

11. Your Husband, Your Friend

I would be remiss to not mention our friendships with our husbands here. They have been the friends who do not leave as we hug the parade. They have been the friends with whom we've built up years of trust. They have been the friends who have borne with us through our finest moments and our darkest hours, and our biggest temper tantrums. So even as we may feel lonely when our women friends leave. The same is true for our husbands. We have been the friends for them that stick closer than a brother. Our husbands may feel lonely as their guy friends leave, but God has left us our greatest treasure in earthly friendship in our marriages.

I'm amazed how frequently I forget to just thank God for the friend who is my husband! I asked for more grace for God to remind me of what a dear friend my husband is and to help me to grow that friendship to be even dearer. His advice, his wisdom, his humor, his crazy music, his gentle ways with me, his knowing me inside and out and loving me more, when it seems sometimes like you should love me less given all the evidence against me. That's worth remembering and thanking God for every day. That's worth making sure I take time to build that friendship even though it's so familiar and sometimes even taken for granted. For whatever it is that you don't like about your husband, take time to think about all the things that you do appreciate. And encourage him with those things!

Special Friends 2: Samuel, Elderly Man of God and Spiritual Mentor on the Outside

The prophet Samuel comes in and out of David's life. We don't really know a lot about their relationship. The Lord since Samuel to Bethlehem where he meets David for the first time and anoints him as Israel's future king, then Samuel goes home to Ramah. We don't receive much more information about the interactions between Samuel and David except that David immediately fled to Samuel in Ramah after Saul attempts to kill him in his palace.

The Bible tells us that David stays and lives with Samuel for a while. We don't know for how long, but it doesn't look like it was for an extended period of time. The only thing the Bible tells us about their time together is that, "David told Samuel all that Saul had done to him." Samuel and David may have been other interactions, but the Bible doesn't tell us about them. Still, Samuel was a part of David's life at crucial points in time, pointing him to the future God had for him.

Mark and I both have greatly benefited from the input of those knowledgeable of our situation but who we don't have regular contact with within our church. These godly friends are usually seasoned in the ministry, and further along in years. They have gone through what we've gone through and have a far better perspective. They are great people to share what's going on and in a way that is different from those within our church. They have been fellow pastors and pastors' wives at another church in the Washington DC area, and they have been friends from across the ocean that we share with via phone. Either way, these friends have been indispensable in shoring us up when we are bitten up and discouraged and giving us wisdom beyond our years when we feel clueless.

I heartily encourage you to keep the lines open with godly friends who have known you before you were in your current situation, especially those who have been or are pastor/pastor's wives. You may not need their special input very often, but when you do, it makes all the difference.

Special Friends 3: Nathan, Honest Confronter and Spiritual Mentor on the Inside

While Samuel was a prophet and spiritual mentor on the outside, Nathan was a prophet and spiritual mentor on the inside. Samuel spoke with David infrequently. Nathan appears to have been David's whole reign. We see David consulting Nathan about the Lord's will concerning building the temple at the beginning of his reign. And, we see Nathan at the end of David's life speaking first to Bathsheba, then David when Adonijah, David's oldest son, sneaks in and claims David's throne for himself.

And in between, we most famously have the account of Nathan confronting David over his adultery with Bathsheba, and his murder of Uriah the Hittite, one of his mighty men and more importantly, Bathsheba's husband. It's hard to underestimate the value of Nathan's friendship with David. His lifelong commitment to David, his godly advice, and especially his God – honoring willingness to say even the hardest things to David, had a huge impact upon David's reign.

We, too, can count it as one of God's greatest blessings when He gives our husbands or us a friend, like Nathan. A friend who is so committed to our good and the glory of God that they are willing to give us not only godly advice we want to hear, but the correcting rebuke, that we don't want to hear and may not even see. God gives us these kinds of friends as we ask him for them. But he also gives us these kinds of friends as we seek them out and encourage them.

Welcoming honest criticism with humility instead of defensiveness encourages others to be this kind of friend to us. We all have blind spots. We need each other to point these out. This takes a lot of grace that is for sure! Not many of us look forward to hearing how we need to change. But what a blessing they are!

What good changes God can make in us! What awful situations He may avert when we have friends who will love us well enough to correct us.

Another Very Important Set of Friends

I know I only mentioned five examples of delightful saints up above, but there's actually another example: the hundreds, even thousands of nameless people of Israel who delighted in David as their king and who thrived under his rule. David certainly had his enemies. Some of these enemies were high-powered, and some of these enemies were among the people. Their loyalties seem to vary with whoever was in power. But there were many among the people of Israel who were steadfast in their support of David. The Bible doesn't list their names. We don't know much about them. But they supported David and were happy to serve in his kingdom.

We have found in our church, there are many members who never get to know well, yet they are praying for us and are supportive of Mark being their pastor, cheerful giving and working in the ministry in ways big and small. And as transient as our churches, they may come and go within a few years without us ever really knowing them. Yet they were faithful members who added so much to the good of the church and whether we knew it or not, helped make our lives better and more fruitful. I find in those times when the "squeaky wheels" of unhappy members are loud in our ears, that it is very helpful to remember how many of the members are quietly, faithfully working alongside us in support. This can be deeply encouraging.

1. Where have you and your husband found friends?
2. How have you gone about finding them?
3. Have you found support outside of the church? Have those friends been helpful to you in different ways than those in your church? How so?
4. Do you have any words of wisdom to share to help others find and enjoy friends in the church without offending others?
5. Have you encountered people who are upset with you because you wouldn't disciple them or regularly spend time with them? How have you handled those situations?