

From Section 4: Alluring Idols

*"The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply;
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips." Psalm 16:4*

Common Sin Struggles of Pastors and Their Wives: Looking for Plenty

"You who are his holy ones, fear the LORD, for those who fear him lack nothing. --Psalm 34:9, CSB

A GOOD THING

Enjoying prosperity is a good thing. In the Garden, Adam and Eve were given the riches of the whole world to care for and to enjoy. In the new heaven and earth, we will feast and fellowship together with the Lord and all of God's people forever.

A GOOD THING, GONE BAD

But now, in the "Now and Not Yet," there IS desire gone wrong. We still desire plenty, but look for it in the things of this world. The riches of the world look so pleasurable. We want to enjoy them, too. We see hunger and need in this broken world and we want to protect ourselves and our families from them. Where will we go to fulfill this good desire for plenty? To God or elsewhere?

The Love of Money and Possessions Causes Serious Problems

It chokes the good fruit of conversion:

"They hear the word, but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful." --Mark 4:19

It plunges people into ruin and destruction. It is a root of all kinds of evil:

*"Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."
--1 Timothy 6:9-11, NIV*

No one can love God who loves money:

"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus." --Luke 16:13-14, NIV

Men qualified to be elders must not love money:

"Now the overseer is to be ...not a lover of money." 1 Timothy 3:2, NIV

THE TEMPTATIONS FOR PASTORS/THEIR WIVES

What tempting circumstances fan sinful desires for plenty? Here are the ones I have noticed:

Trappings of the Good Life

The world runs after “the good life.” Fat bank accounts, big houses, beautiful clothes, fast cars, luxurious trips, great schools, and fun toys are on this lifestyle’s shopping list. “You deserve it” is the line advertisers often use to perpetuate why you should have more.

Pastors and their families are bombarded with the world’s definition of plenty, just like everyone else. Especially in the United States, they may be pastors to members who are financially successful and whose lives include many of these trappings. It can be tempting to compare what your family is able to enjoy or have compared to these members. This leads to a heart of ingratitude, covetousness, envy, jealousy, and even anger against our husbands or God (for not providing better for us than they do.)

Misplaced Future Security

The world runs away from insecurity as much as it runs towards the good life. Keeping hardship, suffering and, of course, death is paramount. Life insurance, health insurance, retirement accounts and estate planning aren’t just good stewardship, they are tools to control the future. This life is all there is. There are so many uncertainties. Let’s do everything we can to hold onto this life as long as we can. “Take control” is the line advertisers often use to feed our hunger for security.

It is very common for pastors’ families to not have the kind of salary to set aside much money for college for their kids or for retirement for themselves. Sometimes health insurance is minimal or not provided at all. It can be tempting to fear the future, with little savings to cover these expenses that will come. It can be tempting to become bitter against the church leaders if they are presented with the need and refuse to help. It can be tempting to think about all the sacrifices your family makes on the good of the church and compare them to the seeming ingratitude the church shows them in providing for their needs.

A Church Who Doesn’t Understand Its Duty

“Keep them humble and poor. That’s the best way to treat your pastor’s family. It keep them close to God,” has been a well-played tune from many a well-meaning church. Sometimes, a church means to provide well for its pastor and family, but don’t know what that looks like. They may not realize to provide well for a pastor and his family is biblically mandated (1 Timothy 5:17); and, will make their service a joy and will only encourage them to stay and to pour even more into the church.

It can be extremely awkward for a pastor to bring up needing a better salary. It may come across as greed, when it really is just need. And, if the church turns down fulfilling needs the pastor’s family request even though they have budget to meet, it can be extremely hurtful. It can be tempting to withhold your affection from the church and to see the members as your enemies. You can feel that you are helpless and that no one will provide for your needs, not even God. It can be tempting start seeing what others enjoy that they have denied your family and become embittered.

Having Plenty Enough

In between big lifestyle and big troubles is just getting by. “The kids need shoes and we all need dinner. The car is making a funny sound and Johnny has a toothache. Let’s just patch that leaky roof again. Do we have enough for a five-night vacation away or just a day trip?” We get by, but expenses have to take turns. We aren’t so much dreaming to strike it rich, just to comfortably make ends meet.

It can be tempting to be discouraged at the day to day penny pinching needed just to get by. Relying on more debt or taking an extra job for you or your wife at a time that sacrifices needed family time are two tempting release valves for the financial tension you are in.

A Church Who Can't Support

Many of the churches in the United States are small, country churches without the means to take care of a pastor's full salary. This isn't lack of desire or lack of understanding. It's lack of funds. Men who pastor in these churches are often bi-vocational, having to supplement their church salary with a job on the side. Balancing multiple jobs and caring for church members can make it extremely hard for these men to also care well for their family's and their own well-being. Burnout, depression and family difficulties are not uncommon. It can be tempting to try to keep balancing everything despite warning signs that it is too much of a strain on you or your family. It can be tempting to act as if you have no limits and you are called to "burnout for the Lord," rather than be a good steward of the life and family God has given you.

Church Cultures

Some church cultures take pride in their pastor's family looking good and having the best. Nice suits, expensive cars, and other high-visibility markers of prosperity are what they want others to see. Other church cultures are focused on wealth because most members live in such destitute poverty. Their desire for survival makes them yearn for more now.

In both of these cases, it is tempting for pastors to tickle itching ears by preaching and living out a prosperity gospel—that God blesses His people with worldly riches.

Poorer for the Gospel

Some men are called to be pastors in poor communities. Their "just getting by" looks a lot like the lifestyles of the Rich and Famous to those they want to reach. They may need to choose to adopt a simpler lifestyle, in clothes, possessions, and housing, as a way to open ears to the gospel. This sacrifice may feel very hard at times when recollecting the easier way of life they experienced previously and could even now, except for the sake of the gospel.

It can be tempting to pity your family for sacrificing enjoyable things they could easily have for the sake of the gospel. This can also lead to a superior attitude around others who have not chosen to make the same sacrifices as you have, forgetting that God gives different gifts and callings and we should appreciate them instead of making them a source of comparison.

RECOGNIZE THE ROOTS

Do you recognize your husband or your own temptations in any of these scenarios?

What roots in your heart do these temptations point to?:

- Greed, covetousness, jealousy, envy?
- Bitterness towards your husband, your church, God?
- Fear of the future, lack of trust in God as your provider?
- A "take charge of our destiny" attitude that leads to foolish financial decisions?
- Arrogance because of all your sacrifices?

TACKLE LIES WITH TRUTH

However slick or legitimate our sin struggles look, we know that with sin, there is a good desire believing a bad lie. Look to God's Word for truth to replace the lies.

God Intends for Churches to Care Well for Their Pastors

"The elders who are good leaders are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." --1 Timothy 5:17

There Is Nothing We Need that God Cannot Supply

"And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.
-- Philippians 4:19

Your Future Is Secure Because God Has Planned It All for Your Good

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. (Jer. 29:11)

God Will Never Abandon You

"Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you." --Isaiah 46:4

You Have Something Better Coming than Worldly Possessions

"You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised." --Hebrews 10:34-36, NIV

Be Content with What God Gives

"But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs." --1 Timothy 6:6

Turn from the Love of Money and Cling to the Greater Riches Eternal Life

But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called." -- 1 Timothy 6:11

Money Cannot Be Counted on for Security, But God Always Can

"As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life."
--1 Timothy 6:6-12,17-19, ESV

Knowing Christ Is Better than All Riches and Is Worth Any Sacrifice

“But everything that was a gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because of Christ. 8 More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of Him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them filth, so that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him,. -- Philippians 3:7-9

RUN TO GOD

Ask Him to give you greater confidence in His ability to provide for your family, both now and in the future. Ask Him to help your church to grow in learning how to care well for your family as a biblical mandate and to be a beautiful and practical picture of the gospel. Ask God to give your family wisdom if finances are so tight that you are considering taking on more debt or a second job.

Thank God for the many ways He has provided in the past. Ask Him for specific needs you have. Ask Him to forgive you and help you turn away from covetousness, envy and jealousy of others who have more. Ask Him to help you and your husband continue to be gracious to the church, even if they are slow to meet your financial needs. Ask Him to make the reality of the riches of heaven more attractive than the riches of this world.

REACH OUT TO OTHERS

Ask others to join you in prayer for a growing spirit of generosity among all the members. Share your needs with them and ask them to pray with you for God to meet them.

Thank your husband for the ways he provides for your family. If finances are tight, work together to make the best decisions for your family.

ARMED AND READY

In the Moment:

If church members or non-Christians make comments about things you have or don't have, be ready with a God-honoring answer. With church members, this may be a way to help them look to their hearts and fight against looking to money for fulfillment or safety. With non-Christians, this may be a chance to share the gospel and the riches in Christ that are far more satisfying and lasting than anything money can provide.

Social media can also be a place where Christians can easily become jealous of each other through family vacations at Disney World or at the beach. Consider whether it is good for your heart to spend much time looking at these posts.

In the Church:

Speak to the elders of your church about your needs. Help them understand what the Bible says about financial care for their preaching pastors. Work together with them to help the congregation better provide for their pastors' families.

In Your Strategy:

Ask the advice of other pastors who have had to patiently teach their congregations to love their pastors through better compensation. Especially ask for wisdom as to how long it is good for a bi-vocational pastor to continue to work and to pastor. What signs of burnout or destructive toll on family do you look for?

Ask those with financial experience to help your family with budget issues that you might make the most of the money you do receive. Get practical help from other women who live on a tight budget. There are usually a lot of tricks that can help your money stretch further.

Read:

Stories of God's faithfulness to provide for His people in even amazing ways, such as a George Mueller biography (though I do not advocate that all Christians should not share their needs with each other. He did this as a special encouragement to the people of Bristol that God is alive and provides for His people in the hardest times.)

The Envy of Eve Melissa Krugger A wonderful book on helping us identify and turn away from envy.

Budgeting for a Healthy Church: Aligning Finances with Biblical Priorities for Ministry Jamie Dunlop

REPENT ON REPEAT PLEASES GOD

We are surrounded with temptation to love money and to look to it to please us and to take care of us. We will have to fight the desires of our heart over and over. But this pleases God! He will be faithful to help us.

YOUR MERCIFUL HIGH PRIEST

Jesus left the riches of heaven to be our Savior.

"Who, being in very nature[a] God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!"--Philippians 2:6-8, ESV

Satan tempted Jesus when He had gone without His most basic needs for forty days!

"Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"--Matthew 4:1-4

Jesus said "no." Why? Because He loved His Father and He loved us! He wanted to fulfill God's plan to save us. Jesus not only went without plenty. He chose to go without ANY until His Father provided, which He did, soon afterwards when angels came and tended to Him.

Isn't it wonderful to know that God knows our needs and He will provide for them in perfect timing with His plans for us. Jesus knows how hard it is to go without. He intercedes on our behalf to help us keep on trusting Him. And trust Him we can! He can help our husbands equip the church to better care for His pastors. He can help us to be content living with the financial sacrifices that pastoring may require. He will always be our provider!

Questions for You

1. How do you/have you desired to have prosperity like the world?
2. Has this led to any sin struggles for you? Have any of these been heightened by or caused by the fact that your husband is in the ministry?
3. What has helped you in these struggles?
4. Do you have any other words of wisdom for people with this struggle?