

From Section 5: The Good Portion: **Finding Contentment Together**

*Psalms 16:5-6 "LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure.
The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance."*

Building A Christ-Like Home for Your Husband in Your Life

It is the delightful, but daunting task that God gives Christian wives to live within boundaries, inscribed by their husband's life. One of the most helpful word pictures that help me decide what has been thinking about making a Christ-like home for Mark in different aspects of my life. Let me explain what I mean by that.

God has given my husband to me to be my head, to honor, to obey, and to support in the callings upon his life, as godly man, husband, father, and pastor. And serving him and doing him good is the great boundary, the great organizing principle of my life. It flows both out of my love for God as well as for him.

This is a foreign concept to most in our world today. It is strange and unthinkable to some, but curiously beautiful to others. And in both cases, it commends the gospel. It is a special opportunity God gives wives to display Christ to the world: a willingness to submit the good will of another. In Christ's case, He submitted to His Father. "I came down from heaven, not to do my own will. But to do the will of Him who sent me." When we commit our lives to, as Proverbs 31:12 says, "do our husbands good, not harm, all the days of our life," we are reflecting Christ's attitude to His Father.

But I've found that not only does living life this way commend the gospel but has been key to contentment for me as a wife, especially a pastor's wife. I do this by laying my life before the Lord and asking Him to show me how I can please Him by making a "home" for my husband in every aspect of my life. This making-a-home image helps me sift through time priorities and heart issues that need emphasizing or need readjusting as we make good decisions for our marriage-shaped ministry.

Here are the "homes" that help me to do this:

1. Make a Home for My Husband in My Heart

Beware Divergence

Carolyn Mahaney, in her book, Feminine Appeal, warns of the danger of divergence among busy husbands and wives. These are wives who might selflessly serve their husbands with their lives, but whose hearts have become disengaged. I certainly have had to fight this, especially when my husband's schedule is very full here at the church, or he has a busy travel schedule away from home.

Things that have helped me:

- Reminding myself of things that I love about my husband.
- Praying that God would keep my heart soft to my husband. Praying for deepening attraction to my husband.
- Avoid getting involved in too many things that would make me unavailable when he IS available.
- Being honest with him when the ministry is taking too big a chunk out of our lives so that he can change to a better balance.

Both understanding our calling: marriage-shaped ministry; and swimming in an ocean of agreement have been of great use to Mark and I as we make decisions. But if I'm honest, this third one, making a

Let Him Know You So He Can Love and Lead You Well

But there's another issue other than avoiding divergent lives that centers on making a home for him in your heart. It's the issue of helping him to know you so he can love and lead you well. This is so important!"

Sometimes, I think we act like our husband should be a mind-reader, automatically understanding us without much explanation on our part. My husband is gifted in many ways, but in this one. I'm guessing your husband isn't either! I've come to realize that helping him understand me is a way that I serve him. You see, if our lives are not to be ministry OR marriage, but ministry IN marriage, then we need to clue in our husbands on what we are like. Our husbands are called to lead us well if they are to be an elder/pastor. Our husbands are to love us like Christ love the church. How can they do that, if we don't help them understand us?

I am NOT saying that there will not be sacrifices involved, if our husbands only knew us better. There certainly will be sacrifices! And, I'm NOT saying that you tell your husband all your needs and wants so that you will get all your needs and lots, just like you think you need and want them. You won't, praise God! God has better things planned for us than we than what we typically think we need and what. God will frequently use our husbands to give us those better things.

But what I AM saying is that the Lord intends for your husband's ministry to the church and his care for you and your family to complement one another. You can help your husband lead and provide well for both Church and your family by humbly helping him understand you and your needs better.

Let me give you a "look under the hood" example, From Mark's, and my life together:

My husband's ministry has definitely been shaped by his consideration of who I am as his wife. On one hand, I don't like to be upfront, and I tend to be overwhelmed by lots of new people. I hate to fly. I suffer from debilitating chronic illness. Sometimes, I suffer from anxiety attacks. I need time to be alone to recharge. I feel the expectations of others keenly. I get upset by difficulties between my husband and others in the church, especially when someone is unjustly, accusing him of wrongdoing. I tend to say "yes" to sacrificing my own needs too much, so my husband can do something else related to the ministry... Only to get upset about it. Welcome to my personality traits and weaknesses!

Now, as Mark has become familiar with these, it has affected his ministry. He wants to care for me and care for the church. From the very beginning of his ministry here at Capitol Hill Baptist Church, he made it quite clear that the church was hiring him, not me. He has consistently taught them that I can serve the church best by supporting him. Knowing my greater need for time alone, he usually asks me before we have people over. He even encouraged the church to build fence around our backyard so we have privacy from the busy church parking lot.

He encourages me to serve in quiet ways. He rarely asks me to fly with him to various speaking obligations, though is tickled pink if I want to. He shields me from details of difficulties between him and various church members, unless he thinks I need to know what's going on or I would be helpful in what's going on. He relies on the other elders to discuss other matters. Mark loves it when I want to speak to women's groups but is very careful about having me do it because I can get so nervous about it that it even makes me sick.

Perhaps most important to us, he's learned to ask me to be really honest about whether something a gospel opportunity is too much and he's learned to ask me to be very honest about how many travelling

teaching opportunities he should take. No longer does he quickly trust my initial answer but presses in, wanting to make sure I really don't feel that it's too much of a sacrifice.

He also helps me to work on my weaknesses. Neither one of us wants to be satisfied with sin or allow it to become an impediment to do good works the Lord could do through him or me. And so, Mark often helps me see my fear of man and challenges me if your God more. He helps me confront other sin issues in my life that negatively affect how I love God, him, our family, and others in the church. He encourages me in ways to overcome the sense. He encourages me with ways he prays for me, and he encourages me in ways that might help me overcome the sense.

There's some example of how my "downsides" impact Mark's ministry. I am so blessed to have a husband who loves me so carefully bears with my weaknesses so gently! He truly is God's greatest gift to me, this side of heaven.

But, by God's grace, I have some "upsides" that impact his ministry, too. I am a fighter and a hard worker. I get knocked down, but by God's grace, I get up again to fight against my weaknesses and sin issues. I like to facilitate conversations between my husband and others. I feel very comfortable serving people meals, whether for one or 100 in our home.

We have a very open house where people know they are welcome. I like to listen to people and encourage them. I have a long list of adopted young men who have lived with us, eaten with us, and spent hours and my husband's study, allowing him to mentor them. I have a special heart for children and for pastors' wives/future pastors' wives. I'm a bit of a pioneer woman, who doesn't mind being left to attend the farm while her husband goes out on extended gospel opportunities outside of our church.

These personality traits and strengths have also affected my husband's ministry. He's able to work deeply in the lives of many men here at our church and able to travel to other places for long for even extended periods of time, knowing that I'm happy he's doing this good gospel work and basically capable of holding down the farm. He knows that even if I'm spending lots of hours preparing, serving, and cleaning up a big meal, I'm happy for him to be talking to a group of people in the other room, rather than helping me. Because of my involvement with the kids and women of the church, I'm able to give him a better sense of their needs.

Some of these downsides and upsides of me traits my husband figured out just by living and observing me over the years. But a lot of them, I've opened my heart and helped him understand. I think this is pretty typical.

You might be very much like me, or you might not be like me at all. But the point is the same: help your husband know you! Help him lead you well! Don't expect him to be a mind reader! Pray that God would help him both understand you and know how to care well for you and for the church... And that God would give both you and the church a gracious spirit as your husband makes decisions. This is not a easy job for anyone involved., But it is worth every effort!

And all these things have helped me make a home in my heart for my husband. I opened my heart to know me. And in knowing me, he has been able to love and lead me better. And it makes my heart even more eager to follow his lead, to love him and to serve him with my life.

2. Make a Home for Him in Your Mind

Our husbands are frequently digging deep into God's Word. Dig together and see how God blesses your marriage and gives you greater unity in vision for the church and for your family.

Ask him what he's learning in his quiet time.

Read his sermon passage in the days leading up to his sermon, so you are tracking with him. Discuss the passage with him. See what strikes him. Bring up any questions or thoughts you have. If he's like my husband, he will be encouraged by your interest.

Find out what he's reading and read it too.

Learn his schedule and ask him questions about his day... Not just how it went, but what was he encouraged about, what he learned what was something he learned, etc.

If your husband is in seminary, have him read some of his readings out loud and have the opportunity to be theologically homeschooled. Most of what I know I have learned theologically was through my husband this way. It was a great way to connect our minds together with an appreciation and understanding of deeper theological truths.

3. Make a Home for Him in Your Energy Level ...Or what it boils down to: Make a Home for Him in Your Schedule.

This means reserving enough energy to spend time with him or on him when he gets home. This is really important to my husband. It very likely is important to yours, too. One good pastor's wife friend told me that she considered it one of the most important jobs to be in her husband away from the cares of the day when he comes home. This takes energy!!!

Now, I know that many of you may be young mothers and energy is a scarce commodity. Do not beat yourself up for being tired as a young mother! You're being a wonderful, helpmate by spending so much time and energy raising your children. Do the best you can here.

4. Make a Home for Him in Your Quiet Time.

Pray for him. You know him better than most anyone on the planet!

Pray for his day and the meetings ahead of him.

Pray for his interactions with you and the kids.

Pray that he would be encouraged by God's good fruit in his life; and if need be, he would be challenged in areas where change is needed.

Look at the passages on elders/pastors in first Timothy three. Pray these for your husband, especially given the specifics in your church and home life.

And mentioned before, meditate on his sermon passage. Pray for God to give your husband wisdom and the congregation grows in response to it.

5. Make a Home for Him in Your Home.

Make your home a place of rest and enjoyment for him. This means different things to different men. For some, this might mean keeping everything neat and tidy. For people like my husband, it's whether he comes home to a house of cheerfulness and peace. He would rather me rest in the afternoon and skip the cleaning, if that means I did a better job, caring for our children and was cheerful and rested when he gets home. Find out what's important to your husband and make that a priority.

6. Make a Home for Him in Your Family

This may sound strange, but we found a coordinating Mark's busy weekend and evening schedules with the children's schedules was one of the most difficult and most important things we did for our family. If only we had done it better! If we have exasperated our children in our parenting in any way, perhaps it would be here. We have even asked our children's forgiveness for not wising up sooner in our parenting, and Mark missing some wonderful times together with them.

We learned that I was the best one to coordinate intentional time as a whole family. I helped Mark make a workable plan for spending time with individual children or altogether as a family. With me as coordinator of the kids' schedules, it helped me set him up to be a better initiator of quality time with them.

Another issue we faced was navigating sermon-writing over Fridays and Saturdays – right when our school-aged children had most of their free time and extracurricular activities. It was hard for Mark to pull away from his work, both mind and schedule – wise on those days. But it was so important to do so. Pray for God to give your husband the ability to spend undistracted time with your children when they are available, even during busy points in ministry. Pray for God to give you wisdom in coordinating family times. Be gracious with your husband, as he tries to learn how to do this. It is not easy.

Be slow to accuse him of not caring. Instead, help him, pray for him, and encourage him! Be humble and winsome in speaking to him if you do feel like you see unhealthy patterns of neglect that he doesn't see or that are continuing on, despite your best efforts. Pray for God to give you and your children gracious, forgiving hearts when your husband doesn't get it right. Pray that God will use for the good even those times that your husband doesn't get things right. God certainly has been kind enough to answer these prayers in our family. I'm sure he will in yours, too.

Coordinating kids and ministry is a reason many pastors' families consider home schooling. Your family will have more flexibility to spend longer time together at times other than the two days before the Sunday sermon with the schooling option.

7. Make a Home for Him in Your Ministry

We've already noted that there will be more ministry needs in your church than you can ever meet. One way to both meet ministry needs, but stay content within your boundaries, is first to ask your husband, what ministry needs he would most like you to support him in.

It might mean serving in the nursery. It might be standing at the door with him after the service. It might be bearing graciously with long-standing, chafing, cultural – but not biblical – standards that are prevalent within your church, such as dressing a certain way. But at the same time, gently and humbly presenting gospel standards as more important than these secondary cultural norms. It might be meeting with a particular hurting woman; or having new members over for dinner. It might be leading a Bible study or providing a place for a visiting pastor to stay. Really, it might mean most anything!

The point is to start your ministry at church with supporting your husband's vision for the church and how you can be most helpful. You will very well wind up doing things you didn't want to do or never dreamed you would do. But I can promise you that if that you will be blessed in great and unexpected ways if you do ministry this way. You will see God leading you well through your husband and that will only encourage you to trust his leadership more. Now that's a reason to be content within your boundaries!

8. Make a Home for His Friends

Your husband needs friends! Make them feel welcome! Give them time to hang out together! They can be a great source of encouragement and sometimes a needed rebuke to your husband.

These "home pictures" help me hone in on how to best support my husband. And while they are good for any wife, I think that are especially helpful for pastors' wives. Why?

First of all, because they keep us on track for best helping our husbands flourish our families as they nourish the church. As 1 Timothy 3 tells us, this is what a man must do to be qualified and stay qualified as an pastor/elder. Our support of them in these ways help them to meet the qualifications that must be in place for them to pastor.

And secondly, because we are high profile P-O-P's --plain ole people-- striving to be content within the boundaries God has given us, to the best of our ability by God's grace given, and to his glory.

It can be a huge blessing to your congregation to your whole congregation. The women watching you live contentedly within the boundaries the Lord is giving you can be encouraged to do the same. While the men can be encouraged to step up as husbands/future husbands to lead, love, and encourage their wives support, for the good of their families.

Chafing Boundaries

But let's be honest here, there's a bit more to this boundaries thing, isn't there? More than just knowing what our boundaries are and living within them. There is the nasty stuff, like in Davis life, the issue, the issue of sin and pain of hard things we endure within our boundaries. There are husbands who fail to lead well. There are wives who fail to submit well. There are children who rebel against their parents and against God. There is illness that won't heal. Budgets that never seemed to stretch far enough. Church members who are unkind, or who hold the pastor and his wife to expectations that can never humanly be met.

How can we be content, even rejoice like David, and the boundaries God has given us when they include things like this?!

Let's learn from David:

David knew he was a sinner, and God treated him better than he deserved, every day of his life.

Remember David's confession in Psalm 51? We, too, are sinners, treated better than we deserve each day. God causes us to forgive others as he has forgiven us in Christ. He causes us to treat others better than they deserve. He will give us the grace to do that. This will help us be content.

God relieved David of some of the difficulties he endured. Remember, David was restored to his throne after his son, Absalom, attempted to take it from him? We, too, should cry out to God to change difficulties we face. It may very well be His plan to change them.

But David also saw God choose to not change other difficulties. Instead of taking them away, God chose to fill these situations with His even greater redemptive purposes. We should pray for God to do this in our lives, too.

Mark and I have definitely seen God take away difficulties we have faced. I am grateful for each one of those mercies. But I must say that it has been learning to ask for God to fill difficult situations with His redemptive purposes that has been one of the most powerful, beautiful things in our lives.

When difficulties do not budge, it has been setting aside just asking we most want God to do. It has been adding to that prayer, for God to fill the situation, as long as He sees fit for it to continue, to be a display of His power and glory in our weakness. This has shown up in illness is not taken away, but grace given to joyfully endure them. It has shown up in family close to us who are still unconverted, but grace given to trust God with their souls. It has shown up in imperfections in our love for one another: stubborn, patterns of sin or weaknesses that we still battle, but God gives grace to love, forgive, and endure.

It is shown up in graciously bearing mistreatment and distrust from particular church members with false perceptions of Mark's leadership. Perceptions which could've been easily cleared up if Mark had revealed some more information about a particular situation, but chose not to in order to avoid greater, unnecessary hurt to the others involved.

Yes, asking for filling the difficulties we faced with contentment is one of the most powerful things we have learned to do within the boundaries of life... And probably the most difficult, too! It is possible, largely for one reason: having an eternal perspective, just as David did. That is, being a person with an eye fixed on heaven, and a heart of longing for fullness of joy forever in God's presence.

Psalm 16:9-12

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure,
because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,
nor will you let your faithful[b] one see decay.
You make known to me the path of life;
you will fill me with joy in your presence,
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

David had joy through his difficulties because David knew that life was about so much more than this tiny little span of days on earth. He knew these days were part of something much bigger, much more fulfilling, and much more enduring: eternal life. Joy in God's presence, with eternal pleasures at God's right hand.

David looked at everything through the lens of God and his eternal plans. He was a sinner, but God had redeemed him to live with Him forever. Others desired to harm him, but David would not be shaken because God was at his right hand. David would face death one day, but even that would not be the end. God would not abandon him to the grave. He would have sorrow and hardship here, but God has shown him the path of life. And this path led to a place where there would be no more mourning, sin, or death. There would only be joy in God's presence, and eternal pleasure.

What would bring David joy in God's presence? Here are two things:

#1: Joy from what God had done.

David looked at the events of his life in light of eternity. He could see that God had ordered his days and the best that God ordained was yet to come! God's own Son, the Messiah-Savior would come through David's family and His throne would last forever!

#2 Joy from what will be forever.

Joy from being free from the entrapments of sin. Free to love God perfectly. Free to know God as God knows him. and no God as God had loved and known him. And this will be eternal pleasure.

This eternal perspective allowed David to praise God for his good boundaries even at the very same time he groan within the difficulties. It is a defiant kind of praise of faith. Not defiant against God, but defiant against the face value of his present difficulties. It's as if he is already standing before the throne of God, enjoying the fullness of joy and seeing clearly the wisdom, goodness, and glory of God's plans.

And this kind of defiant praise of faith is fostered by an eternal perspective is what I will leave you with. Difficulties will come into your life in the ministry. Don't waste them! Fight our natural myopic, shortsighted focus! God is big and very, very good. His plans are glorious, and within them, He has woven wonderful things, even into your greatest difficulties.

Like David, praise God today, ahead of time. Rejoice now, in the middle of the difficulties you face or the boundaries that chafe. Now's the time! Not just when they are over and you've seen how God provided for you and what wonderful things He was up to. Fight to be contented now! Borrow the praise from before the throne, when you will undoubtedly praise Him for doing all things well. Fight to be joyful now, while praise still does not see, but only believes... and sometimes even that feels like a "barely."

Surely this is some of the richest praise we can utter this side of heaven! This heavenly perspective is something that not only is delightful to God and good for us, but is a wonderful way to support our husbands and courage others in the church. For, of course, we are just high profile, plain old people, just like everyone else in our church. Like us, they each have own set of difficulties; are trying to live within their own, chafing boundaries; and, striving for the defiant praise of a heavenly perspective. And this gives us a wonderful opportunity to encourage them, side-by-side as brothers and sisters.

Like David, even in the midst of our greatest difficulties while with one side of our mouth, we're crying to God to keep us safe, may we also praise him for the boundaries that he has placed in our lives and the fact that he makes all things not just pleasant, but beautiful in His own time.