

THE L'S:

Lots of Quick Tips We've Learned over the Years in Ministry

Helping Your Wife Flourish

Lead the Congregation in What to Expect from Your Wife

From the beginning, make it clear that you need her to support you and your family. She is invaluable for you being in the pulpit. She may very well wind up doing all sorts of things that the congregation might love for the pastor's wife to do, but she is doing them not because they expect it of her, giving her "position," but because that is where it works out well for her to serve.

Let Her Sit in the Service

Treat her spiritual needs as important as everyone else's. In other words, make sure she is in the service and not always filling the ever-present last-minute volunteer holes. This may be especially tempting for church planting situations where there are still so few hands to do so much.

Let Her Be a Church Member

Don't expect her to be your unofficial assistant pastor. Let her be a part of the church, one among many. Good for her. Good for the church. And biblical, on top of all of that.

Latch On to Regular Devotions

There is nothing like regular times in prayer and God's Word to strengthen, prepare and refresh your wife for life. Especially when she's caring for little kids, it can be very hard to find undistracted moments for devotions. Scheme together about how to make this possible for her, whether it's reading to her, watching the kids for her, or some other creative solution.

Let Her Settle In

When you are new to a ministry situation, encourage your wife to wait before taking on any long-term church obligation. This gives her time to get to know the church, to get to know your family's schedule, and figure out where/how much to serve. We've found that church's love to get their pastor's wife immediately involved in leadership and sometimes don't understand why a wife would want to wait. However, if this is coming from YOU, it's much easier for your wife to say, "My husband needs me to wait until we are settled before making any long-term or important commitment role at the church. He needs me to support him so we can help our family settle well and so he can care best for you all." My husband encouraged me to do this for 6 months before getting very involved. It was a huge help.

Lay Down Some Lifelines

Lifelines are people in your life that support you, pray for you, and give you wisdom. They may be people in your church, outside your church but in your town, someone from a previous church you were part of, or some other godly, respected person in another part of the country/world. I've found it helpful to have someone in all of these categories, and that each kind of lifeline is useful in its own way. For instance, build local lifelines with people in your church/community for regular, daily/weekly support. But it can be quite helpful to have some of those more distantly located lifelines to reach out in times of crises in the church.

Lay Aside the Ministry: Find a Day Off that Works for You and Your Family

If you are like my husband, it can be so hard to lay aside the ministry, both in his head and in his schedule. When he preaches, his day off is Monday... when the kids were in school and the rest of the church staff

and office are up and running. Even for me, it's much harder to not treat Mondays like the first workday rather than a day off with my husband. But this old dog and his wife are sticking to their old tricks at age 65 and we're doing fine. However, I've heard many young pastors say that they've switched to a Friday day off and leave Monday a slow, catch-up-on-work day in the office. It gives you more of a two-day weekend than the Saturday/Monday split.

Helping Your Kids Flourish

A Little Goes a Long Way

Don't underestimate the relationship building you can do in even little bits of times or doing very uninteresting things with your kids. Take a quick break to shoot a few hoops with your son as a break from your sermon prep. It shows you are thinking of him, even though you have to work. Have one of your kids run to the store with you. The conversation in the car, just the two of you, can be more impactful than you know. Time together is time together. Even little bits can go a long way!

Let Your Kids Be Non-Christians

I know. This one sounds bad. But we found that pastors' kids can feel so much pressure to become Christians that they profess conversion before it's really the case. I can remember how terrible one of kids felt when as a teenager they expressed that they were not a Christian. They didn't want to upset us. But we told them that you can never become a Christian if you don't first know that you aren't one. We told them that we want to know them and where they are spiritually. That helped this child so much.

Sometimes the pressure comes from the church, as if to say, "Something must be wrong with the pastor if his kids aren't Christians." This is so hard! But remember: conversion is of the Holy Spirit. All you can do is to teach them the good news of Jesus, leave them with a legacy of Scripture in their hearts, provide a consistent testimony of Christ's work in your lives (to the best of your ability, by the grace of God), and pray. So much better this than false conversions!

Leash Up Your Church Lips

Be careful about what church matters you talk to your kids about or discuss with each other in front of them. They are so quick to pick up emotion but often are not so quick to understand the situation. But on the other hand, if they pick up on something, you DO need to address it. There were a number of times with the kids simply saw me come home upset after a difficult members' meeting and were angry at the church, just because they love me and don't want to see me hurt. I tried to carefully navigate giving them enough information to understand why I was upset, but also communicate why I still loved the church. Helping your kids through the tensions of church difficulties is so hard! It is definitely one of the things that had lingering impact on how both of our kids still feel about church. Pray for their hearts and for wisdom!

Listen to Your Kids about Who Comes to the House

When our kids were young, they were happy with most anyone we invited to our house for dinner. Hospitality was a noisy affair, but it was a happy one in those days. But as our kids became tweenagers and teenagers, we found that they did not want just anyone to come over. They wanted dinner time to be either with people they knew or with just our family. We listened to them. And while sometimes we did still have people over who either they didn't like or didn't know, most of the time we didn't. Instead, we would either go out for a meal with these kinds of people or meet with them outside of mealtimes. And the kids really appreciated that we respected their feelings and protected our family time. I don't think our kids are unusual in this. I've heard many other pastors' wives say their kids went through the same phases.

Learning at Home?

One of the biggest pillars in your family's life you will navigate around is your children's education. From the ages of 5 to 18, this is what will consume most of their Monday to Fridays. With your husband's most important ministry day being Sunday and the most common kid activity day, Saturday, many families feel very constrained.

If your husband is distracted like mine is on Saturdays, this makes his active participation in their extra-curriculars much more difficult. It's for these practical reasons (on top of other philosophical reasons), that some ministry families choose homeschooling or hybrid school options. These education models put more flexibility into the week and can dovetail more helpfully with the ministry schedule.

Linking You and Your Kids

If you are having a hard time finding good alone time with your kids or keeping up with what they are going through, enlist the help of that wonderful wife of yours! This was of huge help to Mark and our kids. I was able to coordinate their schedules to make the most of his time and their time (especially when they were of school age). And, I would tell him about upcoming events that it would be very important for him to attend but would require advanced notice/schedule changes. Even now, with both of our kids grown and out of the house, if they tell me of something good or hard they are going through, I make sure to share it with Mark so that he can reach out to them, in case they haven't had time to connect.

Making the Best of Your Boundaries

Locate and Limit the Overlap of RMH's and RFH's

RMH stands for "Rich Ministry Hours." These are times when you are likely to have great spiritual conversations or other meetings of high importance for church business/church members. RFH stands for "Rich Family Hours." These are times especially enriching to your family. While much ministry takes place during the expected church office hours, many take place on Sundays before, during, and after services, as well as weekday evenings. It is THESE times that you want to notice and discuss with your wife, for her good and the good of your whole family. Yes, Sunday mornings you are up front of the church, leading the service or preaching. But that leaves her wrestling with all the kids. Is there someone who could sit with her during those times and help her? Do you have many weeknight meetings that get in the way with family time? What can you do to limit these or move them to regular church business hours? Talk together with your wife about how much RMH and RFH are overlapping and come up with a plan that will help your family.

Leverage Lonely Hours (aka, twirl with the swirls)

This is another suggestion for dealing with the overlap of RMH and RFH. If your wife struggles with loneliness or being overwhelmed with the kids at times when you are still at church (such as after the morning worship service and she takes the kids home and starts on lunch; or at night, while you have an elders' meeting), these might be great times to invite a single woman to join her, help her, and build their friendship. We've come to call this twirling with the swirls where we are filling the gap with good things.

Let Me Ask My Husband/Let Me Check My Schedule

Many times, a church member has come up to me and on the spot wants to know if I can commit to doing this or that. And too many times, I've either forgotten a prior commitment or am so excited about the opportunity that I say yes with fully thinking through it's repercussions. I've learned over the years that unless it is something small or urgent, that I do better by saying that I need to check with my husband/my schedule first and can get back to them. Avoids overbooking, protects family time, and prevents disappointment.

Love Language

No one really talks much about love languages these days, but I have found it of huge benefit in our family to make the most of what limited time we have together. Discuss with your wife what you see as each family member's love language (conversation, cuddle time, doing something fun, etc. and try to make these important parts of your regular times together.

Let Them in the Door?

It's easy to think of hospitality in only in the stereotypical sit-down, homemade meal with your family fashion. But we found that different seasons of life, especially regarding our kids, this was not the best fit for our kids, our company, and sometimes even us. We learned to get creative. Perhaps you've just had a new baby, but you still want to have someone over. Get takeaway or have them bring a meal for you all to share. Or, perhaps you need to have some serious conversation with the people coming over and it's not suitable for your kids' ears. Ask them over for dessert, after the kids are in bed. Or, get a babysitter and go out to eat. Having people over is rarely about the food. It's about connecting. Get creative!

Learn What Works Well and Stick to It

You will find your husband and you have things that are very important to you. Learn these and try to have these as part of your regular schedule. And don't just guess what these things are, ask each other. You might be surprised at the answers you get.

A few years ago, books on love languages were all the rage. That term may not be in use very much, but the idea is still very much in play. It's that we all have different things that say I love you in more significant ways and in less significant ways. Part of you loving your spouse and him loving you, is figuring out what says I love you most to each of you and figuring out how to keep those elements as a regular part of your life, even when life gets crazy. And don't go thinking that what's important for the couple next door will be just as important for you. My husband and I love to give each other foot rubs and listen to some of his crazy music and talk. We do that many nights of the week. You might find that disgusting. And that's just fine. And furthermore, don't let some stereotype of sex be the scoresheet for what enjoyable intimacy is for you. You and your husband are only called to love each other well in this special way. It doesn't have to look like anybody else. It doesn't have to be as frequently or infrequently as anybody else. That is a decision that you two make together, Scripture tells us. And that's good enough for me!

If you have kids, also find out what is especially meaningful for them. It might be meals together. It might be watching their soccer games or horse shows. It might be reading stories at night or a regular Father-daughter date night for ice cream. Your husband's schedule may limit their participation in more activities than yours, but by finding out what is most important, you can make the most of the time he is available.

Lean Into Your Schedule: Spontaneity is Over-rated

Okay, let's be honest. Spontaneity scores a lot of points on the love-o-meter. Nothing says "My heart overflows and love for you," like a spontaneous show of affection or a big bouquet of roses you were expecting. But as life gets busy, our schedules get crowded, and then throw in a sick kid or two, the opportunity or energy to be creatively spontaneous seems to dry up. And unfortunately, lack of spontaneity is too often blamed on lack of love. Let me encourage you to enjoy spontaneity when it happens, but grow in your esteem of deliberate, planned out love. And when you think about it, doesn't planning ahead and prioritizing your time as a couple say even more than the wonderful gush of warmth from a last-minute, random act of kindness? I think it does.

Treasure planning over spontaneity. Tailor your planning to whatever is needed, whether it be organizing a babysitter so you can have a regular date night, blocking out time in the evening on your schedules for

a regular walk around the neighborhood are just sitting on your back porch talking, to having sex. Mark and I learned that when he has a particularly busy week or has been out of town to plan in extra time together immediately afterwards. We noticed a pattern of me being more likely to feel neglected right after times like that. Now we know to keep those days especially free to give us good catch-up time in whatever form needs to take. The other big advantage that planning has over spontaneity is you can prepare for it. For example, if you know you are planning to have sex on Monday night and a day with your kids typically leaves you exhausted, you can choose to give your kids some quiet time in their bedrooms and you take a nap yourself. That leaves you with the energy you need to be with your husband in the evening.

Building Unity/Encouraging One Another

Lifetime Learner, Not Loser

You will be learning your whole life. And you will be practicing the same lessons over and over. Be patient with each other and full of graciousness. We've had a lifetime of trying to balance family needs and ministry, and after all these years, we still find ourselves needing to make adjustments. There are still times when the bumps are so big that Mark asks me, "Is it time for me to find another type of job? I want to make sure that I am caring well for you during this season of life."

Lean into Language, Not Assumptions: Don't Expect Your Spouse to Be a Mind Reader

How many times in your marriage have you had arguments over you or your husband thinking it should be obvious to the other what your/his needs were? Or perhaps they know the needs, but don't meet them at a time when it seems as obvious as the nose on your face that you need them? Mark and I have had plenty of arguments like this over the years, especially during the earlier years. After a while, we began to realize that just because something is obvious to us doesn't mean it's obvious to our spouse.

And even if the need has shown itself many times in the same way and we think our spouse should have recognized the pattern by now, that it still may not be obvious to them. Again, it's easy to decide this lack of observation is due to lack of care. But every time we get in the argument, it became obvious that there was no lack of love, just lack of "getting it." So in humility, we have come to give each other helpful prompts. Yes, sometimes that does take the sweetness of initiation out of it, that our spouse saw when we needed, observed it and followed through. But it is better to give a helpful prompt and give our spouse a chance to love us the way they want to than discouraging them by expecting them to see something they are obviously not very good at seeing.

An example of a very needed helpful prompt in our case has been what we've come to know as the "wife on the side" nudge. A "wife on the side" is a reference to those throwback diner restaurants our family love to go to where you ordered two eggs over easy and some sausage on the side. The eggs were the main event. The sausage was the side. When we've gone through a season of lots of guests and extra engagements, or too many guys wanting my husband's time in the evenings, sometimes I start to feel neglected. I could just get angry at him for not noticing that I haven't been getting much TLC lately (and I most certainly have done that); or, I could just tell them with a little smile on my face, "I'm starting to feel like a wife on the side." He gets the point without me getting upset that I need some together time to help me start feeling more like the eggs over easy than the sausage on the side.

Laugh

When you realize you are learners, you can laugh and learn more easily from your mistakes.

Look Together

Look together at all you agree upon and appreciate in your life together in the ministry, then figure out the “rubs” where issues arise. This helps you see just how deeply you are partners in agreement already and sets you up to act as teammates as you try to figure out the problem areas in making ministry and marriage/family fit well together.

Lift Up with Loose Lips

My husband calls my encouragement the wind in his sails. His encouragement is the same for me! There is nothing like encouragement to help each other grow and to give each other perseverance to keep on doing the hard things. It shows you notice what the other person is doing (or trying to do) and that you appreciate it.

One more tip on encouragement: don't save your encouragement for only when your spouse gets an A+ in something that has been a struggle for them. Encourage them for what you see in terms of attempt and accomplishment, not just perfection.

Catching Difficulties Before They Get Too Big

Living Places, Visiting Places

As in, there are places where you live and places where you visit. There are seasons in the ministry that may require extra amounts of sacrifice that are good to sustain in the long haul. Recognize these as they come. Work together and scheme how to weather them best for your family. Set milestones for re-addressing these especially busy times. If they turn out to continue far longer or to require a far greater sacrifice than first anticipated, they are no longer a place you are “visiting”, but a place you are living and need to be seriously evaluated. An exception to a rule becomes the rule, if the exception becomes the pattern.

Let God Be Infinite

Don't try to do it all. You can't. You will always be finite. There will always be a “shape”, There will always be “boundaries” to what you can do and can't do. Live finitely, finding a shape in which your family can flourish within the ministry. Pray! Ask God to fill all the needs. Ask God to give you wisdom understand what is that best shape for your family and grace to live within it.

Learn the Difference between Capability and Capacity

Capability means you are able to do something. Capacity means you have the time, mental space, availability to do something. There may be many things you have the capability to do, but only a capacity to do some of them. This differentiation can be a great help in making decisions that make good boundaries on what you do and good ministry-family balance.

Lock Up Checkpoints

Set up regular times to talk about your schedule, about how things are going. Make these non-judgment times but team strengthening times. The newer you are in a job, a change of life (such as a new baby), make these communication check-ins more frequently. Don't leave these issues as the elephant in the room that never get talked about except in heated arguments when nerves are frayed. Schedule regular visits to the “zoo” and see to those elephants. Much better way to live!

Learn from Other Ministry Families

There is nothing like the advice of others who have felt the wonderful calling as well as burdensome weight of ministry to help you persevere as well as avoid some of the sorrows. Meeting up with ministry couples in a similar church situation or family season can help you encourage each other right where

you are. You can compare notes about how you are each coping with the struggles you face and pray for each other with great sympathy. Meeting up with ministry couples with years more experience under their belt may be of even greater benefit. Not only can they share compassion for what you're going through, having faced it themselves in all likelihood, but you can profit from their hindsight being 20-20 and hopefully even avoid some of the mistakes they made.

This is why here at Capitol Hill Baptist Church we have encouraged both our pastors and other like-minded pastors from the area as well as our pastor's wives and the wives of those other like-minded pastors from the area to regularly get together for prayer, advice, and support. We've been having these groups for over 25+ years and seen the great help these have provided. It can be a safe place to share your struggles and honest place to receive life-giving help.

I would encourage you to try to find at least one other pastor couple to regularly get together with for encouragement, wisdom, and prayer. Use that time not just to talk together, couple to couple, but also for the men to talk together as pastor-to-pastor, and the women to talk together pastor's wife-to-pastor's wife. And if you do have a number of like-minded pastor couples either at your church or in the area, consider starting a regular gathering time with them. And if you don't have anyone in your area, but you have someone in your past even if they live on the other side of the world, use the blessing of modern technology to set up a video meeting. There are some wonderful apps that even let you have a video chat with multiple people in multiple places at the same time.

Triage for Ministry Sheep Bites **Delighting in the Saints, Even When They Aren't Delightful**

Look Out for the Triangle of Trouble

The Triangle of Trouble occurs when you tell your spouse about a difficulty between you and another person, which you later resolve, but your spouse is left feeling upset and out of fellowship with that other person. I have experienced this triangle many a time. It feels like you don't have a good reason to be upset with the other person since they resolved with my husband, nor do I have a reason to speak to that person, but the problem was never really between me and them. Best advice: try to avoid putting your wife in this situation. Best awkward advice: Encourage your wife/go with your wife to speak to this person and bring reconciliation.

Learn Your Wife, Limit What You Tell Her, Lean on the Elders

Every wife has a different capacity for handling church difficulties. I, personally, have a very small capacity before I become a ball of panic. And yes, I can speak to myself with biblical truth and pray for my husband and for others involved. But there are times when it is better for me to just not know. Learn your wife's capacity for things like this. And remember: she's not an elder. Be careful about sharing sensitive information that may be too much for her or really shouldn't be shared with her anyway. Lean on other elders who God has called and equipped to bear these burdens.

Lambs are Silly Creatures

There are very good reasons why God calls His people sheep. They scare easily, get themselves in stupid situations, follow the flock, and need a good leader to protect them, to name a few. (If you have a chance, get a copy of "A Shepherd Looks at the 23rd Psalm" to learn so much more about sheep and how we act like them, usually in not-so-flattering ways. Remembering that the people in our congregation (including my husband and myself) helps me persevere through difficult or frustrating times.

Loving God's People You See Is Necessary to Loving the God Who Saved Them

David, in Psalm 16, says "as for the saints in the land they are all my delight." When we are going through a difficulty with church members, the last thing I want to say is that they are delightful. But I've found that I need to remember that even if they are delightful, God always gives us a reason to delight in them. That's because God chose each and every one of His people from before the creation of the world. He knew they were sinners, yet He chose to send His Son to save them. He swallowed up the death they deserved (and I deserve), taking all the punishment for their (and mine) sinful behavior.

I can "borrow" God's love for them, even when my heart feels cold and hard. I can persevere in pray for them, asking for God to help them and to help my husband and me to keep on loving them and to bring unity and forgiveness. This is what God desires of His people: "If someone says, 'I love God,' but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? And He has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers." 1 John 4:20–21. So right, but so hard. God give us more grace!

Living Before Your Congregation:

Let the Congregation Look

Let them know you: KNOW-tice versus "NO" tice The 1 Timothy 3 passage about men qualifying to be elders implies that the congregation needs to know you in order to recognize you as an elder. And, since the qualifications include your character and your leadership in the home, it means that they need to know you and your family as well.

What Will They See as They Look?

Let Them See the Gospel

We display the gospel—all of it! You might hope to always display the character of God but many times you're going to show that you're a sinner in need of a Savior and asking Him to make you look more like Him.

Let Them See the Right Kind of P.O.W. in Your Wife

Some wives, me included, may find it to be a scary thing to be a pastor's wife. They, like me, may tend to want to be a P.O.W. – a Princess of Wow and have a life full of wow gifts or wow godliness that wives use to serve the church. This may be a protective mechanism, or a desire to meet everybody's expectations, or that somehow, we are supposed to be the example to everyone of the end product of every kind of godliness and good work. This truly is P.O.W.: a prisoner of war.

Far better to be another kind of P.O.W.: a Plain Ordinary Wife, dependent upon the Power of the Word can be one of the most helpful ways a pastor's wife sets an example among the congregation. Yet another faithful church member, slowly being transformed into the likeness of Christ, seeking to support her husband, care for her family, love, Jesus, love others, and do whatever else the Lord has for her. Much more like Fuddruckers, buns in progress, in view from start to finish.

Let Some See More: Friends:

We all have blind spots. We all have weaknesses. We all have sins. We all feel discouraged. We all need friends. But how to find them? Many of our friends are among the elders and their wives. But we have many friends who aren't. If you or your wife are struggling to find your friends, start with working alongside people, or having people over as a couple, and getting a deeper sense of what they were like. The more you get to know them, the more confident you can feel about letting them see more of your

life, weaknesses and struggles. Sometimes the friends you can be most honest with or a phone call away, but we are always praying that God would give us friends in our lives close to us. The more distance there is, the easier it can be to hide something that needs to be seen.

Let Them See Faithful

Never perfect, but always forgiven and always striving to be faithful, being changed into his likeness, as God's workmanship.