

From Section 6: Living within God's Good Limits: **Making a Plan**

Psalm 16:5-6 "Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup;
you have made my lot secure.

The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
surely I have a delightful inheritance."

Limit Liars: Halving, Doubling Your Husband's Ministry **and Other Measurements of Success**

"Choose your wife carefully. She can double or half your ministry. I praise God that he has given me a wife who is doubled by ministry," my husband has told many a single man seeking to become a pastor. I think he's right. A wife can double or half her husband's pastoral ministry.

I'm grateful that he thinks I've doubled his ministry, but I have to be honest, what first came to mind with those words "doubled his ministry" looks very different from what it actually turned out to be. In my mind, doubling a ministry sounds like everything at home get sacrificed while everything at church that needs to get done, gets done. One point, church and God. Zero points, Connie and family... But it's all good for the glory of God. Hmmm....

Bad Ministry Math

This way of thinking came down to bad ministry math. "God = Church" and "Church Needs > Family Needs" These are two, common bad ministry math equations. These "limit liars" can make it seem like only the family should feel the brunt of our finite lives. If there's more good work to be done at church, the family should let the husband do it.

Corrected Equation

Fortunately, Mark corrected my bad ministry math. He explained that actually, God's top priority for him is to care well for our family. It is his job to balance ministry and marriage/family so that he flourishes our family even as he is nourishing the church as its pastor (1 Timothy 3). I still struggle with bad ministry math in my heart from time to time, but my "tutor" Mark is on-hand to keep the reassuring corrections coming.

Your Presence Is Requested: Our Husbands

Our pastor husbands often get far more requests to preach or teach or counsel or be present at meetings outside of regular business hours (or that require preparation time outside of regular business hours) than they can do and keep to a regular pattern of good care for us their wives and families. Some of our pastor - husband's may have a pretty good sense the balance and know when to say no and when to say yes, but I would say most of them need us to help them find that balance.

It is so important for you to know your tendency when you and your husband make decisions about these ministry requests: are you a clingy under – sender or are you a guilty over-sender? Clingy under-sender's tend to say no more than they should, while guilty over-sender's tend to say yes more than they should. Everyone has a tendency; you just need to know yours. I tend to be a guilty over-sender. The thought that me telling my husband not to do a good gospel opportunity because of me makes me feel like I am a hindrance to the gospel. I have to remind myself that I do not help my husband by hiding my

needs or our family's needs from him. He needs to care well for his family.

He needs me many times to show him what that means, perhaps not in theory, but often times on a week-by-week basis. He is the head of our family, but I worked under him as the chief nurturer who typically is more aware of the undercurrents among the kids and the flow of our family schedule. He needs to see what's on both sides of the scale. It may be easy for him to see the benefits of whatever gospel opportunity is presented to him, but it often takes me to show him the costly, sometimes less visible weights to family life that need to be placed on the other side of that scale.

I have to remind myself that "no" can glorify God every bit as much and sometimes more than "yes". If you are a guilty over-sender like me, make sure you share with your husband how much you appreciate him going through decisions with you and how even so, you feel bad about saying it sounds like too much for your family. Give him a chance to lead you well and care for you the way he wants to care for you. Trust that the Lord will fill the need even though it will not be through your husband. He is infinite. We are finite. He can do it.

I will be honest with you: there were many years when I did not share with my husband the weight that these extra gospel opportunities was taking upon me and upon our kids. I wound up letting anger and bitterness grow in my heart towards my husband about how much he was away for a number of years, until I started sharing honestly with him.

The funny thing about that conversation was I was angry with him, but it wasn't really his fault! I was the one not sharing. How could he care for us better if he didn't understand the toll ministry after hours was taking upon us? How weird it is to confess to someone your angry with them about something that is in their fault! I beg you: be humble. Practiced finiteness! Love your husband and help him do his job well by helping them understand what you and the family needs.

This seeming "sacrifice it all for God" mentality is not what doubled ministry looks like. Frankly, it is a quick route to halving or even ending your husband's ministry, not to mention embittered children and adulterous husbands or wives. I'm not saying no sacrifices are ever involved. They most certainly are! There are times when a Hallmark movie is my best friend while my husband is up in his study working on his sermon on a Saturday night. There were times when only the Mommy parent was present at a horse show or soccer game, when the Daddy parent was longed for, too.

There are definitely sacrificial "places where your life visits", in which your husband does miss out on important ways you and your family need to receive his love. But these should be ONLY places your schedule visits. And they should be very much in contrast to "places where you live": a regular, healthy pattern of caring for you and your family's needs. Family life thrive plus ministry thrive. This is what it means to double your husband's ministry: helping him to care well for you and his family but doing it in strategic ways that help his ministry thrive as well.

But what if you're not like me. What if you are clingy under-sender? Oh, this is so hard! Share this with your husband. Tell him your concerns about being unwilling to let him go. Pray together that God would give you and him clarity in unity and what gospel opportunities your husband should take that will require his out of office hour time. Ask God to help you send your husband out and bless him greatly in whatever he's doing. Try to remember to pray for him while he is busy at that task and to remind yourself, that God is using you to bring about that good work through your sacrifice and through your prayers. Ask God to encourage you with the fruit of that ministry and with grace to make the most of those times when your husband is away.

And whether you are a guilty over-sender or a clingy under-sender, when you send out your husband you can make the most of this time by filling it with good things that can be done in his absence. For example, if there's a young single girl who has free time and could come over and hang out with me and the kids during dinner and after dinner, I can have some extra help and we can have a fruitful (or just fun) time of talking or doing something together. Actually, some of my best discipling times have been framed around my husband's absences. And, the time that could be lonely actually becomes enjoyable.

Your Presence Is Requested: Yourself

Pastors' wives also have to watch out. We can be tempted to think doubling our husband's ministry at church is you saying yes to every hole that needs to be filled. But you being spiritually bone dry will not help him at all. And you perpetuating a human infiniteness by filling all those holes, does not help your church to grow stronger. It may mean that less can be done at the beginning, but it may mean that more will be done later on as members step up to help instead of assuming that you will do it.

There is perhaps no one more vulnerable to overfilling holes than the sweet wives of men who are church planting or who are called to serve small churches/church plants. Especially when a man is in a situation where there are so few others who share his vision and sometimes his theology. This man's wife may be the closest partner he has in duplicating and modeling his good plans for the fledgling church. That may put a lot of extra demands upon her, especially if there are kids in the home.

Both pastor and wife, in these situations, need to be on high alert against burn out. If the pastor's wife is being relied upon as sole provider childcare, women's Sunday school teacher, hospitality provider among or any other key role, her husband needs to be careful to set healthy boundaries on how much she serves for her spiritual sake better to offer childcare or Sunday school class twice a month and have her well-fed other two Sundays a month, then two provided every Sunday and not protect her spiritually. You can always add more later, but it's very hard to take away after you have begun.

And do not underestimate the importance that your family's example of "finiteness" is for the rest of the church, too. Your family can be a wonderful picture of for the congregation to look at to look to for what it means to be a godly family understanding its limits and stewarding life well. Actually, a lot of what God has used to train my husband to be a good pastor has nothing to do with a seminary course. It has everything to do with living life together as husband and wife as parents as people in this fallen world. It's not either/ or, it's both/and when it comes to families and the church and our husbands as pastors.

Life Less-enings

The other lie that frequents diligent, ministry-hearted pastors and their wives is that they are doing "less ministry" when life brings changes that shrinks the boundary lines, either in comparison to another ministry family or in comparison to what they used to be able to do. Oh, how frequently I listen to wives who think they are a "bad" pastor wife because they aren't leading women's ministry like another wife or because they aren't leading a Bible study like another lady in the church, etc, etc, etc.

Perhaps there are a few women out there who maybe should be doing something they aren't doing. But to this date I've not met one. All of the many struggling pastor's wives I've met feel they are doing too little in the ministry because they are comparing themselves to another pastor's/elder's wife or to a previous way they used to be involved in ministry. Comparison is rarely a good motivation or score card for you as a ministry wife. You and your husband, as you open you lives before God, is where those decisions are made.

When we first came to D.C., I suppose you could say we looked like a stereo-typical pastor's family. We had lots of in-home hospitality for church members and visitors. I was very involved in Children's Ministry. Our kids attended every kids' event there was. We were at every pot luck and closed the church doors most days. We lived right across the parking lot from the back door of the church and people just opened the door and came right in. Oh, but how life has brought many changes.

Some of these came as our kids grew up and needed more of a private life. Many more of them came as I hit wave after wave of illness. Starting back in 2013, I started collecting autoimmune diseases like they were Pokemon cards. Only instead of gaining power points with each one, I lost ability to do the things I had done for so many years. In 2014 I was treated for thyroid cancer and complications from that have forever changed my life and what our lives have looked like in the ministry.

But that has been nothing compared to the rare autoimmune condition I developed in 2025. It attacked my kidneys, my arms and legs. Without medication, I slip down to paralysis. Even with medicine, my bed is in our dining room, and I have very little stamina. Because it is an immuno-suppressive drug that keeps me going, I have even less immune system than stamina. I have to be careful to keep my distance and hugs and hospitality in our home are a thing of the past! Talk about a ministry limiter!

We joke that my new last name is "Finally" because I'm so rarely seen by newer people at church that they always say "Finally I got to meet you." I'm grateful when I feel well enough to make it to at least one of our two Sunday services each week. I frequently sit out in the hallway and listen from there, in case I start feeling bad and have to go home. I still write children's curriculum and when I'm having good days, am involved in outreach to the community and to kids. I could go on, but I think you get the point.

Now you might think that these are dreadful, ministry-depleting boundaries; but the truth is, God has made them beautiful. He has multiplied my sufferings in encouragement to the church both as they have seen how my husband has cheerfully served me and as they have benefited from the ways God has tenderized my husband's heart as we have gone through this suffering together. And, He has used the testimony of His sufficient grace for my sufferings to encourage many women in the church, especially those who also suffer with chronic illness. If God has made my pinched boundaries a pleasant place and a rich inheritance, then I can tell you, that God can do the same with yours.

Ask God to help you receive with gratitude the boundary places even as they shift inwardly. Ask Him to fill them with greater bounty. Ask God to help you be faithful with what He has chosen as your portion and cup. Ask Him to make you a display of whatever He wants you to display, not to be a carbon copy of what He has chosen to display in someone else. He has something special He planned to only display about Himself through YOU! Let Him do it!

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." --1 Thessalonians 5:16-18