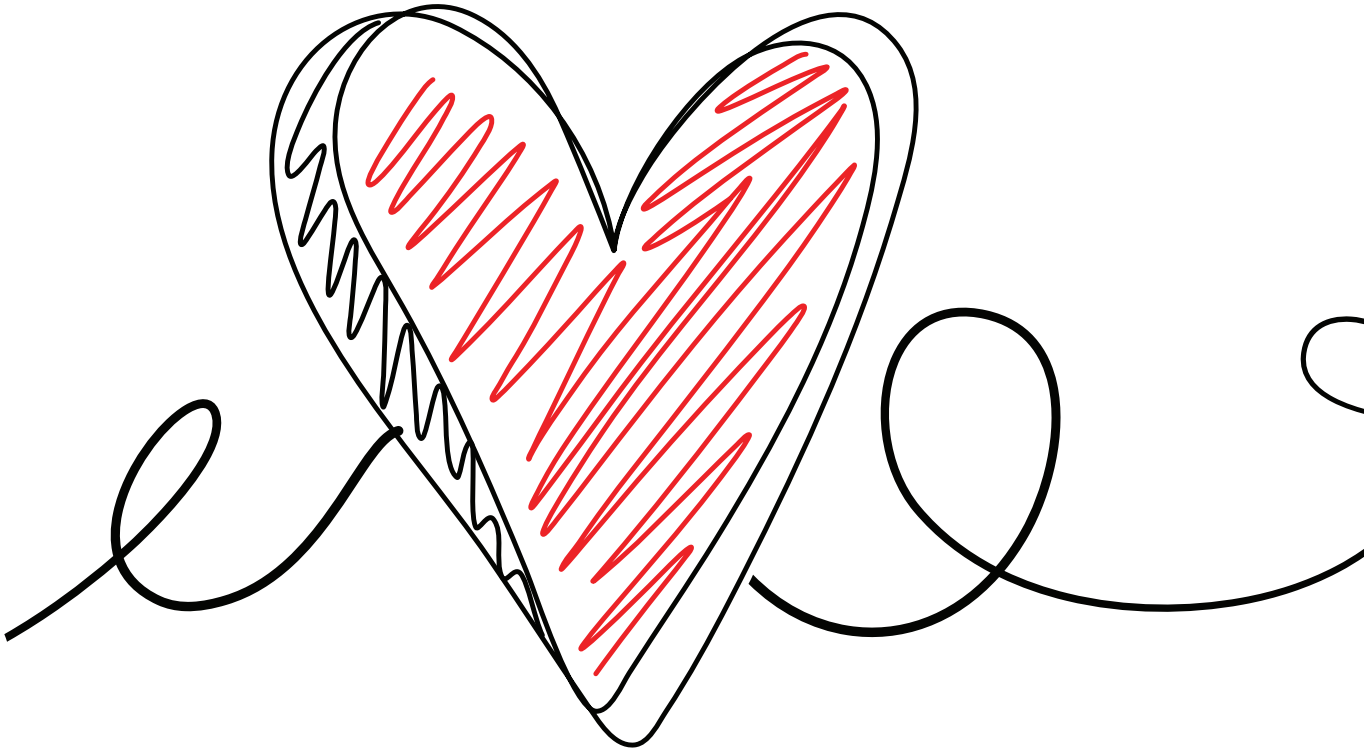
Marvelous. Messy. Ministry.



Flourishing Your Family as You Nourish the Church

Connie Dever

ABOUT THIS COLLECTION

This book contains selections from talks that I've given over the years, especially to ministry wives. Most of them come from a series called Gently Take My Hand and Lead Me. It was organized around Psalm 16, which is why you will see many references to that psalm and to David's life.

I had hoped to one day turn all of these into a book, but health issues lately have put a damper on that project. In the meantime, I hope you will find these selections, even with some typos, encouraging to your ministry family.

While you are welcome to simply read the selections straight through, they are meant to be a resource of articles for you to pick and choose. Read them on your own, with your husband, or with a wives' group, as they were originally here at Capitol Hill Baptist Church.

Feel free to photocopy selections for your personal or ministry use. I have also put pdfs of these on my website, praisefactory.org, for you to easily download and copy that way. Just look for the Pastors' Wives tab at the top of the home page.

Grateful for your partnership in the gospel,
Connie Dever

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Five Ways Mark Has Cared for Me in the Ministry, (and You Can Care for Your Wife, Too) Notes from an interview in May, 2026

1. How many years have you had together in marriage and ministry?

This makes 44 years in ministry and marriage. 32 years here at CHBC.

2. Are there any particular struggles you have faced as a pastor's wife in these years?

Two, particularly:

- Fighting the temptation that the best pastor's wife is a "Princess of Wow." Someone who has everything together, knows everyone in the church by name, meets everyone's expectations, and does everything right.
- Fighting the temptation to feel that our family is a "Gospel Blocker" if our needs mean that Mark needs to do less at church or has to turn down a good gospel opportunity, especially those that take him away from home.

3. What has Mark done to help you with these struggles and care well for your family, even as he has cared well for the church?

Five ways:

#1: By being an Ephesians 5 husband, committed to sacrificially loving me as Christ loved the Church.

Being clear to me (and to others) that regardless of what else he does, that I remain, in God's plan and in Mark's life, his top priority of care. He says to me, "They can get another pastor, but you are my wife for life."

#2 By encouraging me to be a Proverbs 31 Bookends wife

Not so much focusing on the middle of that passage, but on the key characteristics found in:
v.12, Bookend #1: "She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life."
v. 30, Bookend #2: "a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised."

Mark's not-infrequent pep talk to me:

"Look to me. Support me. This is best for me, our family and for the church. There's no one in a position to support me like you. Don't be a Princess of Wow. Be a plain ordinary woman, dependent upon the power of the word. Be my wife and mother to our kids! Be a regular faithful church member. This is what you are called to do, not meet everyone's expectations as a Princess of Wow. This is worth far more "than jewels" to me. I lack "nothing of value" as you do these things. (Prov.31:10-11) This is where "honor" lies (Prov. 31:31).

#3: By being a 1 Timothy 3:1-7 Pastor

1 Timothy 3:1-7 says:

"Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full[a] respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under

the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap."

The summary of these 1 Timothy 3 qualifications for a man to become and to STAY a pastor/elder fall into three categories:

- Teach the church and keep it pure.
- Lead with godly character; provide a godly example.
- Manage his own household well.

I remember these better as:

- Nourish the church.
- Furnish godly leadership/example.
- Flourish the family.

The word "manage" definitely includes that a man provides and his family follows his godly leadership. But for me, the biggest take away is that when our family needs lead to a change in when or what Mark does in ministry, that does not mean we are being a Gospel Blocker, Instead, I understand now that Mark caring well for our needs is actually AN INTEGRAL PART OF what he's called to do as a pastor. And to withhold honestly sharing with him about our needs keeps him from being able to good decisions about ministry, as the Lord calls him to. And that is definitely NOT doing him good, but harm!

We've come to call this Marriage-shaped Ministry. The idea that God has woven the needs of our family INTO the shape of Mark's ministry so that he both nourishes the church AND flourishes the family.

By flourishing, it's the idea that the family is in a pattern of well-being, even through the bumps of ministry. It certainly does NOT mean there's no sacrifice involved, or sadness or difficulties. It DOES mean he and I look carefully at the sacrifices our family makes for the sake of ministry and choose them together.

And the amazing thing about this, is that it's not just good for our family and keeps Mark qualified to be a pastor/elder as Mark makes good balanced decisions for us. But it also FURNISHES a wonderful example for the many other men in the church, in the ministry or not, who God is also calling to balance family life with their careers. It's another way that Mark equips the church for works of service to build one another up.

And, we've found that the church is blessed by the time Mark spends in the "crock-pot" of our family life, growing in wisdom, character, dependence upon God that then flows out to bless the church in how he counsels, preaches, and prays, to name just a few things.

#4: Live with Psalm 16:5-8 confidence for God's plan for the Church and for our family
Psalm 16:5-8: "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. I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken."

David, who wrote this psalm, had many boundary lines that DIDN'T look pleasant at face value. But because of his knowledge of God and faith in Him, he had confidence that all the boundaries were indeed pleasant in God's sovereign plans.

Mark's complete confidence in God's sovereignty as needs in our family change the boundaries of his ministry has been perhaps the most helpful to me. Even if our needs eventually mean he is to step down

from the ministry in order to care well for me/our family. "Is it time to go?" he has asked me, numerous times in our life in ministry. And while I'm sure that there would be sadness in leaving, what I see in him is confidence that God knows what He's doing. The Church is HIS bride and He will care for her, with or without my husband. This attitude simply grows my love for him and for the church.

Sometimes, the church can feel like a mistress, taking so much a pastor's affection and time. But Mark's confidence in God's sovereignty regarding when and if we should stay in the ministry or not, takes that away. I am my husband's partner FOR the good of the Bride of Christ, not in competition with her. "The boundaries have fallen in pleasant places" because God sets them.

#5: By being an Ephesians 4:11-13 Equipper of the Church

> Ephesians 4:11-13: "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

This is where the biblical principles Mark calls the 9 Marks of a Healthy Church come in. Pastors equipping a church to build one another up into the fullness of Christ.

Not only is this what God has given pastors to do for their church, but it blesses ministry families. Pastors are not building a church of consumership but one of every member discipleship. There isn't a one man show, but a deep bench of pastor/elders to lead the church. As the church learns to build one another up, it makes room for the pastor to better balance family and ministry, because he's not the one-stop shop for every member's needs.

4. What happened in 2025 that particularly challenged Mark and you to maintain the balance between family needs and ministry?

In January 2025, I developed an extremely rare, very debilitating autoimmune condition that first attacked my kidneys and then the nerves in my arms and legs leading to complete paralysis. I spent 100 days in the hospital over seven stays as they searched for the cause and tried to get control or find a cure for it. And perhaps not surprisingly, last year's difficulties lead to Mark discussing with me and others as to whether it was time for him to completely step down from ministry at beloved Capitol Hill Baptist in order to care for me.

But by the grace of God, the support of our church, and some very smart doctors, we made it through the year, I responded to a drug, which gives me four months relief at a time, instead of two weeks. Yes, I'm still in a wheelchair and using a walker. My hospital bed is in our living room and just a few days ago was the first time in almost a year that I was able to climb stairs. I can only walk for five minutes at a time. But I can do dishes, make dinner, and other household basics. With the help of able-legged friends, I've continued to hold kids' outreach events in our front yard and Children's Ministry workshops during the Pastor Weekenders we hold three times a year. It's not what life used to be, but together, we have found a new balance and a way to flourish our family while Mark continues to nourish the members of Capitol Hill Baptist as their pastor.

5. How did the church help you through this?

In so many ways! Here are but some:

- Elders telling Mark to do less and helping him do less by stepping up to take on leading worship service/offering to preach, etc.
- A host of women members taking turns feeding me, caring for me in hospital/at home.
- Pastors coming to sing songs to me.
- Men driving Mark downtown and just waiting in the car while he visited me. (almost no parking downtown DC)
- Many people praying and sending encouragements.
- Others offering to help pay for what became some hefty medical bills.

6. How did the church's help to you and Mark last year enrich your thoughts about the church?

I've always been a fan of the 9 Marks because I do believe they are biblical principles that make churches healthy. But last year, I think I came to see more than ever what a BEAUTIFUL CHURCH is a healthy church. It glistens with God's glory and shows off His love for those who call on His name. And it is like a beacon to those who do not know Him, to come, taste and see.

When you spend one hundred days in the hospital, people get to know you. In my case, because of the church's support for us at the hospital, they didn't just get to know me. They got to know Mark and so many others from our church. And as they were amazed at how they selflessly served me, they asked about Jesus. And it amazes me to realize that if I hadn't had so many hospital stays and if I hadn't gone down to paralysis so that I could not care for myself, the church's beautiful display would not have been so amazing. Praise God! Suffering is never for nothing, as Elizabeth Elliot used to say. On this side of heaven, where we will still know suffering, may the Lord fill every occasion of it with His grace and an opportunity to display His love, up to Him and out to the church and to the world.

> "And this is how all men will know you are my disciples when you have love for one another."
> -- John 13:35

7. What did you reflect on from God's truth that helped you through your sufferings?

Two "Surely's" were so helpful:

#1: Isaiah 53:4

> "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."
> There were some very dark times, when I could not move my arms or legs at all. No one knew if they would ever find a way to control this condition. At first, all I could see was a deep pit of suffering.

But one night, the Lord reminded me of something that Betsey ten Boom once said to her despairing sister, Corrie, while they were in Ravensbrück concentration camp: "There is no pit that God is not deeper still." I began to stop thinking of my paralysis, and how intensely awful it was, as a yardstick measuring down into the depths of my suffering, but as a flagpole pointing upward, being a display of me the height of God's love. That He would bear the full force of this suffering and so much more for all of God's people when He died on the cross for us! Absolutely amazing!

#2: Psalm 23:6

> "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

By looking for the Lord's goodness and mercy each day, the Lord helped me to be grateful and joyful. He helped me know that He would help me be grace-full and faith-full for whatever purposes He had for my suffering BECAUSE He is the giver of grace and He is always faithful.

8. How did what you went through last year impact Mark's ministry to the church?

In some ways, Mark did less at the church. He cancelled going on a big trip to Turkey to host a conference celebrating 1700-year anniversary of the Council of Nicaea. Other pastors took on some of the things he usually did at our church. He found substitutes to step in for his role in the Nicaea conference. I know he certainly was more tired than usual trying to do everything and also just because he was concerned about me. He juggled a lot, but always took time away from other things to come visit me at the hospital.

But the Lord used these difficulties to enrich Mark's preaching and prayers and that was a positive impact upon the church. Many members mentioned that to me. Once more, there's the Lord using what is happening in our lives to make Mark a better pastor for the church!

9. Any last words to pastors with wives who are discouraged because of limitations from chronic illness?

The Lord doesn't waste anything! Even if He doesn't take away your suffering, you can know that He will always fill it with His good purposes. And, in my years in the ministry next to Mark, I've come to see that it hasn't been the "Princess of Wow" pastor's wife that has been an encouragement to the church, but the "Princess of Weakness." The blessings that have come from my struggles far outweigh everything else. There are only two kinds of days: good days and good fighting days. We LOVE good days of sunshine and roses, but God loves good fighting days to grow us to depend upon Him more and to reflect His all-surpassing greatness, goodness, and faithfulness.

(This was turned into two 9Marks podcasts available through 9marks.org.)

Caring Well for Your Family in the Ministry, A Talk for Pastors

The following talk I've been asked to give to our intern classes here at CHBC as well as to the men at the Senior Pastors' Sunday Weekender Lunch, three times a year. It flows out of years of being gently led by my husband, Mark. May it be encouraging to you as you lead your family, too.
--Connie Dever

AND SO, IT BEGINS

It was a rare, very cold and snowy night in Durhan, North Carolina in January of 1982. This Colorado girl made her way through the slick, unplowed streets from Duke's East Campus to West Campus with an important delivery of warm chocolate chip cookies for Mark. He had been sick the night before and for some reason I thought chocolate chip cookies were what his ailing stomach needed. (Not sure the logic behind that!). I found a place to park, plunged through snowdrifts and up to his dorm room, only to find the door locked. "Wait outside. I'm on the phone," he told me. I was a bit miffed at this. Really! After all my efforts, THIS was his response?! What kind of phone call would be so important and so private that he would keep me waiting in the water puddles in the hallway! Well, as it turned out, he was on the phone with my mother, asking for permission to marry me. And that stomach "bug" he had had the night before was due to "cold feet" over whether I was the girl God wanted him to marry, rather than any virus.

Why all the turmoil over this decision? Was the idea of being married to me THAT scary? In all honesty, yes and no. No, I wasn't THAT scary. Actually, I was much of what he desired in a wife. On top of enjoying each other's company, I was striving to love the LORD and love Mark. I wanted to be lead by him and wanted to use my life to be his helpmate. I loved God's people and wanted to see them grow.

But on the other hand, yes, I was "scary." My father had died while I was a young girl and there was a real hunger for male affection that was no doubt more than usual. Mark wondered if he would be able to meet my needs. And yes, I did have some significant back issues that plagued me. Would these issues be more than he could care for? Mark was committed to living out the Ephesians 5 biblical mandate to love his wife for life in a way that echoed Christ's self-sacrificial love for the Church. If we were married, I would become Mark's highest care priority. That meant that his other dreams or desires --even the desire to go into the ministry-- would be shaped, and if need be, even set aside to care for me. Mark knew he loved me, but he was right to soberly think through the potential repercussions of my needs on his life. Would caring for me be a good fit for the life and ministry to which God was calling him?

Heartless or Heartful?

Perhaps this sounds heartless to think this way. Love is love, right? But, to me, it was wisely thinking through what it would mean to love me well and him deciding if he could do what was needed to do so. THAT is love! But that's also why Mark threw up the night before. It really was such a big decision. Marriage is for life. And there was no crystal ball to gaze into with a definitive answer for all his questions about the future.

Assurance At Last

But Mark looked to something surer, SOMEONE better that night for guidance: the sovereign Lord! Nothing is outside His knowledge. Every moment of our lives is in His plans. As David says in Psalm 139:16: "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." That night, the Lord gave Mark the assurance he needed to proceed towards marriage to me. Mark the reassurance he needed to go forward towards marriage. He had confidence that the love I had for Mark was a love the Lord had given me. He had sovereignly woven the shape of caring for my needs into the shape of whatever ministry to which He was calling Mark, and He would use it for our good and His glory.

The Lord has been faithful over these 40 plus years in marriage and ministry together. Like any marriage, it has not been all sunshine and roses. We have learned many a thing the slow and hard way. At times, we have felt the chafe of my needs/our family's needs tighten the cinch on Mark's ministry. At times, I have struggled with a dried-up love for the Church, feeling like a "wife on the side" compared to ministry to the Bride of Christ. But overwhelmingly, we have seen bountiful fruit both in our family life and in ministry together. We have experienced a growing love for the Church, and an absolute awe at God's perfect sovereignty. He has redeemed every difficulty and blessed every step over these past 40+ years.

I would love to share with you the "Big Three" that have been so important to loving the Church and caring well for me and our kids over the years. Then, I'll end with a lot of quick-fire practical tidbits. We hope this will encourage you as you look for a wife to share your life in ministry or consider how to care well for the wife (and family) you already have.

BIG NUMBER 1: YOUR WIFE IS YOUR TOP CARE PRIORITY FOR LIFE

Many times, I've heard Mark say, "A married pastor is called to be a husband, more than he's called to be a pastor, so choose your wife prayerfully, carefully, for her sake and for your ministry's sake. You can get another job. The church can get another pastor. But your wife is your wife for life."

A la Ephesians 5, loving your wife and caring for her needs will be a life-long top priority for you. And without a doubt, loving her (and any children) well will impact the shape of your ministry. Like Mark did in considering me as his possible wife, we would encourage you to think carefully about her needs and how you can meet them and how ministry will impact them. If something is going to go, as my husband says, it will be the ministry you are in, not the wife to whom you have committed yourself!

An example of someone who might not be a good fit is if you are considering a pastoral situation overseas in an area where there is little access to good medical care and the woman you are attracted to has significant, chronic health conditions that need regular, nearby care. Loving her well would probably mean leaving behind that type of ministry.

But on the other hand, don't go looking for a P.O.W. –a Princess of Wow, "perfect specimen" of a woman with no weaknesses, so that her needs never "cramp" your dream ministry style. First of all, such a woman does not exist. And second of all, because the Lord's sovereign plans are always better than our dreams. He never fails to weave great good into your life and your ministry as you love her well with her weaknesses. More on that later….

BIG NUMBER 2: ENCOURAGE HER WITH THE PROVERBS 31 BOOKENDS

I don't know who King Lemuel was or how God inspired his mother (see Proverbs 31:1) to give him this description of the Proverbs 31 woman, but talk about a "Princess of Wow", or I guess "Queen of Wow" in her case. I have had a dread relationship with this passage for years! She is overwhelmingly accomplished with seemingly unending energy. If I translate her giftings into what mine should be as a 21st century pastor's wife, I am an epic fail! If I were her, I surely I would be meeting not only my family's needs but so many of the expectations of others (especially in the church). What a mess!

But over the years, Mark comforted and catechized his tear-stained, feeling-like-a-failure pastor's wife with this encouragement: "You aren't called to be everything to everyone. You aren't called to meet all their expectations. You are called to love the Lord and to do me good, as my wife. Be a faithful member of our church. I need you! Be my helpmate with our family. No one else can support me like you can. And if you are wondering if you are doing what you are supposed to do, just come to me!" he has said to me many times. Such wonderful words for my soul!

Then came the day when I realized that King Lemuel's mother said the same thing as my husband, if I had only looked more carefully at the bookends of that Proverbs 31 passage rather than at the long job description in the middle. Take a look:

Bookend #1: Proverbs 31:10-12
"A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life."

Bookend #2: Proverbs 31:30-31
"Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate."

There you go. The Proverbs 31 bookends: a wife that longs to do her husband good and fears the Lord.

Care for Your Wife by Encouraging Her with the Bookends

These bookends have been such a great relief and encouragement to me over the years. And especially when my husband uses them to help silence (once more) false unrealistic expectations of well-meaning church members or that brew in my heart, of my own making. My guess is, they can be of great comfort to your wife, too.

Looking to God's Word for Guidance

A Proverbs 31 Bookends woman sets her sights on doing good to her husband and part of that doing good will be in response to what he does for a living. She seeks to understand what God has for him to do and sets out to bless him and his calling with her life. We see that in the original Proverbs 31 text as this wife is up to all sorts of good things that bless him and their family and that complement the work God has given him.

Studying what God calls pastors to do has been vitally important to Mark and me as we work out my pastor's wife's version of fearing the Lord and doing my pastor/husband good in many ways. These Bible passages have:

- Helped us soberly consider what kind of ministry, if any, is a good fit for us.

- Guided us in finding healthy guidelines for our family in ministry, and provided indications of whether we should at least discuss whether it's time to get out of the ministry.

- Helped us make decisions for our family from a place of biblical unity, especially important when sacrifices need to be made.

- Helped us work through expectations that others have for me, my husband, or our kids as pastor and family.

- Helped me know how to better encourage, pray for, and support my husband in what God is calling him to do. They have provided Mark with ways to better lead and care for me as his wife.

- Grown a heart of love and patience for God's people and appreciation of my husband as he perseveres in shepherding them, crucial for any pastor's wife.

One passage that has been especially helpful to us is Ephesians 4:11,12. Let's take a look at it.

Four Reflections from Ephesians 4

Ephesians 4:11,12 says:
"Christ himself gave … the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Reflection #1: Pastors Are a Gift

Christ, Himself, gave the Church pastors. As a pastor, you are gift from God, called to equip God's people so they can build one another up. Because of this, part of your wife longing to do YOU good will undoubtedly also include her wanting to support you in equipping the church, as well as supporting you and any kids in the home.

Why This Has Been Important to Us
Christ does not give bad gifts. He gives perfect gifts. That is, gifts perfectly suited to do what He wants them to do. And Christ didn't just give, but He GAVE. These pastors were part of His sovereign, eternal plan, even before they knew they were to be. What God wants to do through him will take place. With God, there are no unfunded mandates! He who sends, gives the grace required. That includes men like my not-so-perfect husband, and their helper-wives, definitely not-so-perfect women like me. This is so helpful when we feel overwhelmed and under-equipped for the task to which God has called Mark as pastor, and me as his helpmate. God will give more grace. He will fulfill His good plans.

Reflection #2 The World's Most Beautiful Transformation

God's people are being transformed into the "whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Why This Has Been Important to Us
Since God knew His people from before the beginning, planning to save them and change them into the likeness of His Son, this is transformation is a sure thing. Could there be anything more exciting, anything better than the front row seat in which to see this change in so many people, as well as in ourselves!

But on top of that, God has chosen my pastor/husband to be an integral part of this transformation. And I, as his wife, get to support him in his role. Wow! There may be many sacrifices and discouragements involved in the ministry, but we know the outcome: God wins and His people are transformed, and these outcomes are for all eternity.

Knowing this helps us to persevere in the ministry, even in the toughest times. Everything we do for God's people is of eternal value.

Reflection #3 Transformation Often Means Trouble, Part 1

God gives the church pastors to equip them UNTIL they reach unity and full maturity in Christ: EXPECT IMMATURITY.

Why This Has Been Important to Us
Ah, that little word UNTIL. It reminds us that every single member of our church, including my husband and myself, is a work in progress. And while there will be many times when God's work in the hearts of the congregation show up in beautiful displays of God's love to God, to one another, and to my husband

as their pastor, I shouldn't be surprised when spiritual disunity arises or immaturity shows itself in how members treat each other or respond to my husband.

Off-handed Comments/Actions
This has helped me to be realistic in my expectations for how the congregation treats my husband. There WILL be times when he disappoints them, even when he's being faithful. As he frequently tells other men, pursuing the ministry, "Don't go into the ministry if you have to please everyone. You can't do it." So, while our husbands (and us) must carefully consider the merit of any criticism or dashed expectation, we don't have to be devastated by them. As a person who lives pretty high on the "love to make everyone happy" Richter Scale, this has been one of the hardest parts of ministry for me. It has been very important for me to have biblical truth through which to filter these comments. If your wife/potentially future wife is thin-skinned like me, this will be a very important aspect of ministry to soberly consider and to learn how to combat.

Two "Weapons" of Choice

Prayer
Praying and meditating on the 1 Corinthians 13 passage on love. Do you realize how all these attributes are undeserved responses to something frustrating or sinful that someone else has done. This is how God responds to us. This is how He wants us to respond to His other sinful people.

Bring Out the Buckets
I've found that many of the actions or comments of our congregation towards my husband or myself are sweet encouragement. And those that aren't, most of them don't come from malicious intent, but from immaturity, lack of understanding, or just plain stupidity. It has helped me immensely to make myself consider whether it's the malicious, immature, or stupid bucket someone's comment/action goes into. Yes, even stupid comments can hurt, but they are easier to get over. This helps me with comments directed towards my husband as well as towards me. It helps me not to build up resentment but see it as an opportunity to clarify a misunderstanding or forbear in love. Caring well for me includes Mark reminding me to think this way. It helps me keep on loving the church, even when people hurt me or him.

Reflection #3 Transformation Often Means Trouble, Part 2

God gives the church pastors to equip them UNTIL they reach unity and full maturity in Christ: EXPECT HILLS TO CRY ON and even MOUNTAINS TO "DIE" ON.

Pastors are often on the receiving end of many immature comments/actions on a wide variety of subjects that don't really matter at all in the eternal scheme of things, such as saying that our son dyeing his hair pink (temporarily for school spirit week) must mean he's in rebellion to my husband's authority. These are a perfect example of something that we put in the "stupid" bucket and forbear.

But there are other issues that matter deeply. Matters of divisive behavior and unsound doctrine that can cause great damage if left unaddressed. And if your church situation is anything like ours, Paul's words "UNTIL we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God" will very well include some of these, and they very well can be hills of difficulty and heartache that you and your family will cry on. And for some, turn into mountains on which your pastoral term at your church dies upon.

In 2 Timothy 4:2-5, Paul counsels Timothy in more depth about these difficulties and what to do:
"Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine.

Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry."

Why This Has Been Important to Us

This passage's emphasis specifically on divisive behavior and opposition to and biblical truth has been wonderful preparation for my heart. No one likes trials within the church, especially me. But to realize that my husband is acting more like a surgeon removing cancer and the patient is yelling at him about the pain he's causing has helped me both be prepared for opposition, to endure the hardship, and to treat others with great patience as Paul encourages Timothy in this passage. It has helped me persevere through painful struggles in the congregation in the most important times. in It's been important me that these hills of biblical truth are worthy of crying on, and even "dying on" for the clarity of the gospel, the good of God's people, and the glory of God.

The Nine Marks

It may sound a bit nerdy, but I've found understanding the biblical nine marks of a healthy church my husband has outlined very helpful in understanding where the crying hills and the dying mountains may arise. And, they have helped me to understand why these issues are worth suffering for. And they are great prayer points for our church and specifically for my husband to have wisdom when these or other issues of equal importance have caused difficulties in the church. Caring well for me is equipping me with knowledge to understand why a particular issue is worth crying and even "dying" for; and, so that I can be ready to keep on loving the Church and encouraging my husband to keep his head and endure the hardship well as we go through it. If you aren't familiar with these, go to ninemarks.org for a description of them.

Too Much for the Family and Me?

Unfortunately, these kinds of church struggles can take a huge toll on your family. They certainly have on me, from time to time. Even though my husband is careful to shield me from information that I don't need to know when these kinds of difficulties arise, there always seems to be enough to chew me up on the inside. It has also been hard on the kids, even when we are being carefully with what they hear. Keep close tabs on your family in these difficult times. Pray that God gives you wisdom not only to help the church through whatever difficulty but to give you wisdom to know when the toll is too high on your family.

This is an extremely important part of helping your family flourish in ministry life. These difficulties can be so hard on their faith. Encourage your wife to reach out to another respected pastor's wife not in your church to share with and to pray with them. This gives your wife a safe, helpful person to speak with and can help combat the isolation that she may feel at your church over this matter. And if possible, you do the same. You aren't the first to fight these kinds of battles! Talk to those who have navigated these in their congregations. You may find their advice helps resolve the matter more quickly and with less "collateral damage" within the church and within your family.

Reflection #4: Not Called to Do It All: Room for the Pastor and His Family

Pastors are called to EQUIP their congregations for works of service that build one another up (not do them all, themselves).

Why This Has Been Important to Us

My husband's job is not to fulfill every need of every individual member, himself, but to equip THEM to encourage one another and build one another up. This is NOT a congregation of consumership. It's a

congregation of every member discipleship. It is still a huge job. The ratio is still not in favor of pastors, with often hundreds of members to one or a few pastors. But it does mean that my husband is not called by God to be a Superman who can do everything, be friends with everyone, and meet every need, My husband, even when doing his job well, will spend more time with some people, and less time with others. It's simply a fact. Your church and your family are going to be in trouble quickly if the "success" of your local church is dependent upon your husband being everyone's best friend and personally tending to everyone's needs.

But, if your husband's equipping of the church leads to a plurality of elders who share the pastoral load, and deacons who oversee the physical needs of the members, and members who take on discipling and encouraging one another, as Paul is saying here, the benefits multiply exponentially. Not only is the church better served this way, but YOU get to pastor within reasonable limits. Furthermore, this is caring well for you, as his wife, **because it means that while God may have given your husband as a gift to a congregation of people, he is not called to be burnt out with nothing left over for his family or himself. He can be both faithful to God's calling and there still be room to care well for you, his family.**

And this leads us nicely into our Big Number Three…

BIG NUMBER THREE: MARRIAGE-SHAPED MINISTRY CARES FOR FAMILIES AND CULTIVATES LOVE FOR THE CHURCH

Ministry will impact many aspects of your life, most every day. I know it has been so for us. This is what we call Ministry-Shaped Marriage. It's what comes from loving and serving God's people, welcoming them into your lives, your heart, and your home. It's choosing for your marriage/family life to be shaped by their needs and makes you willing to be inconvenienced and even make sacrifices for the sake of God's people and to the glory of God.

And make no mistake, sacrifice and inconveniences will come knocking, often fast and furious. How will you decide which sacrifices to your marriage/family for the sake of God's people should be made? Who will win? The next urgent church need/wonderful gospel opportunity or regular family time? For me, this became an overwhelming struggle that turned into a groundswell of anger towards my husband and our local church, and it really wasn't either of their fault.

Gospel Blocker?

I guess you could say the problem stemmed from my own mangled version of the Proverbs 31 bookends. As Mark's schedule grew busier and wonderful gospel opportunities in DC and elsewhere multiplied, my version of fear of the Lord and longing to do my husband good came to mean doing everything I could to facilitate as much ministry as possible. "Surely, we can find a way to do without him for another night" if it's something at the church, or "We can manage for a few days," if it involves travel, I would tell myself. My default solution had become sacrifice needed family time for the church. To do anything less made me feel like I was being a "gospel blocker."

I'm a "getter-done kind of girl" and so I used that "super-power" to free him up for more ministry. Mark has always been great at discussing his schedule and asking my opinion, but the problem was I wasn't giving him the information he really needed to make the best balanced decisions for the good of me and our family because I was always trying to make it possible to squeeze in something else on the ministry side. My husband is a wonderful, wise leader, but an omniscient mind-reader he is not. He needed me to be his helpmate in understanding what would help his family flourish.

Perhaps there would be a conflict between regular sermon prep (that he spends quite a bit of time doing on Fridays and Saturdays) or another special gospel opportunity. I would be on hand, but Mark might not be. At least one parental representative was present at our daughter's horse show or our son's soccer game, I would tell myself. Mark would regularly ask my opinion on whether he should say yes to this or that opportunity, but my reluctance to have him turn down a great gospel opportunity meant I did not fully express how important certain activities were for him to attend This tendency of mine led, at one point in our marriage, to the undercurrent of anger towards Mark and the church, I previously mentioned, which really wasn't his or their fault.. If I withhold information from him and in a sense, keeping in my hands decisions that he is to make, then I am NOT allowing him to lead, and that was not doing him or us good. I was inadvertently doing him harm. Ugh!

The dam of anger finally burst, and the conversation that resulted was one of the biggest turning points in the ministry life for me. Mark helped me realize that God calls pastors not to an out of control MINISTRY-SHAPED marriage in which the well-being of the pastors' family is always taking a backseat to the needs of the church. No! God calls pastors to Marriage-shaped Ministry. That is, God may have planned to give pastors to the church to equip her, but He also calls a pastor's care for his wife/family to remain his top priority. Seeing to their needs will shape the what, when and how of his ministry in the local church. Mark encouraged me that only in being completely honest with him about my/our family's needs could he lead us in finding the best balance between church needs and family needs, as he wanted to and as God intended.

Oh, how this helped me! No longer did I feel like a Gospel-blocker if our needs led Mark to cut back or turn down ministry opportunities. Best of all, it washed away the anger I felt towards Mark and the church. God had a sovereign plan that wove together our family's needs and the church's needs.

I don't know if your wife or family has these same struggles, but if so, I'd love to encourage you that the best way cultivate in your wife/marriage/family an enduring love for the church and being in the ministry is focusing on what seems to be the reverse: MARRIAGE Shaped Ministry. And where in Scripture did this idea come from? 1 Timothy 3. Let's take a look at that passage and tease this idea out some more:

> 1 Timothy 3: 1-7
> "Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer (pastor, elder) desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap."

The qualifications for a pastor in this passage can be summarized into 3 aspects:

1. Able to teach sound doctrine/refute unsound doctrine.
2. Live and lead in a godly manner.
3. Care/manage his family well.

Or, as I like to think of it:
1. **NOURISH** the church.
2. **FURNISH** a godly example/character in life and leadership.
3. And **FLOURISH** the family.

And right there is the idea of Marriage-shaped Ministry. 1 Timothy 3 implies that a man needs to flourish his family as a qualification to become and to stay a pastor/elder. No doubt this is partly because a married pastor's number one obligation before God (as my husband reminds me) is to love his wife as Christ loves the Church a la Ephesians 5. He needs to be able to continue to care well for her (and any kids in the home) while also loving God's people in the local church. Paul also infers that the skill to care well for the church is something that is seen in the smaller testing ground of his leadership in his family.

What Is Manage?

Paul uses the term "manage his household" here, and that can sound he's merely speaking of a husband's/father's authority being honored and obeyed by his family. That is most certainly a very important aspect. A husband/father needs to care well for his family with consistent, loving leadership. In a day when "gentle parenting" is becoming rampant, in which you persuade a child to change their mind to what is best and rarely address issues of the will, it is so important for fathers (and mothers) to truly discipline their children and help them obey even against their inclination. As Proverbs 19:18 warns: "Discipline your children, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to their death." Having had our own strong-willed children who grew up to thank us for our consistent discipline of them, I cannot be more convinced of the importance of this kind of leadership.

But, I think flourish is a fuller picture of what Paul means here, and it certainly has been that to which Mark has aspired our family. We take flourishing to mean a basic, consistent pattern of your family's wellbeing within the boundaries of your regular ministry life.

This does NOT mean there are never sacrifices made or suffering endured. And, this does NOT mean that you are always getting the balance right. There are plenty of lonely nights I have experienced as Mark is away or burdensome member situations that bear down hard on us, for example. Or times when the kids were sick of pastor's kid comments and being treated differently than other kids because of who their dad was.

But it DOES mean that sacrifices or struggles that make flourishing difficult, do not go unnoticed, unattended, or become the basic pattern of our lives. We communicate about these, work hard to keep these in balance, and make changes.

Some Reasons Balance and Flourishing in the Ministry Can Be So Hard

While divisions within the church may be the most hurtful difficulty we experienced in our time in ministry, balancing our family's needs with church needs has been the most consistent difficulty we have faced throughout our years in ministry. I've heard many other pastors' and their wives say the same thing.

Here are some reasons we have observed:

The Needs are So Great

Families and church members are such needy creatures, needier than there are hours in the day to fill. More can always be done. Add to this a turn-around church, small church, church plant or bi-vocational situation. and a regular pattern of balance can seem almost impossible.

Ministry Hours Colliding with Family Hours

Most churches post regular business hours, but for most pastors, those hours have far more to do with office staff and far less to do with them. Elders' meetings, counseling sessions, committee meetings, small groups, discipleship opportunities, and hospital visitations, on top of mid-week Bible studies and Sunday services that fall after hours. And with these, there is getting there early to prep and greet, then

staying there late for further conversations. These outside-of-office-hours meetings bear some of the richest fruit, but unfortunately, they collide with some of the richest times for families.

Not Much Left in the Tank
Even when pastor/husbands do get home, the burdens they bear can leave them distracted, emotionally depleted, and discouraged. This can leave them with very little to give to the very wife and children they hold as their top priority to care for.

The Only Thing Constant Is Change
Both at church and in the home, there is always something changing.

At church, new people are becoming Christians, new members are coming in, old members going out. Elders are rolling off their terms and new ones are coming on. Pastoral responsibilities shift around; budget constraints tighten. Member care crises, cases of discipline, and even whether a man is preaching or leading a Sunday School class shifts from week to week. And all those examples are just on the pastor's side, not even taking into consideration the many ways pastors' wives contribute to the regular workings of the church.

And at home, chores need doing, babies are born, school starts up, after school activities multiply, discipline must happen, sicknesses come and go, cars break down, vacations are planned, relatives come to visit, friends drop in at a moment's notice, middle schoolers who want more "just family" dinners drying up what were some of your "best" hospitality slots, teenagers who seem to open up only late at night, etc. etc. There are seasons of change on top of days of change. How can you balance moving targets?

Flourishing the Family Also Nourishes the Church
Why is flourishing the family not just important but a qualification to becoming and staying a pastor? Paul says that if a man can't manage his own household how can he be expected to manage a church of believers. But I would say that on top of the family circle pointing to a pastor's ability to care well for a local church, God actually uses a flourishing pastor's family to nourish the congregation in some very influential ways.

Here are 3 ways we have seen this to be the case:

#1 Because you teach your congregation, not only through your preaching from the pulpit, but through the megaphone of your life and your care for your family. Just think about it: your life and your family are two things that you are doing that is just like everyone else.

#2 Because your life and your care for your family reveal the truth of your testimony. I like to say that God is requiring of you what he is desiring of everyone else in terms of care for your family and your family's willing, even cheerful response to you and your leadership. Once more, these are two things that you are doing just like everyone else, and as they watch (which they will), this makes your testimony shine and gives them even more receptiveness to your preaching and to your leadership.

#3 Because your life and your care for your family are God's rich training ground for much of the wisdom you will have to give others and the orchard for the fruit of the Spirit that will help you forbear with others.

A.K.A. The Crockpot

The kids and I have been the "crockpot" of life that God has used to teach Mark many things that have tenderized him and made him a better preacher, counselor, elder, decision maker, example for the church. So, again, far from getting in the way with what God is doing, our family has actually been making him a better equipper of our local church, even if it means less actual hours with the church because he is meeting family needs.

I love to encourage other pastors' wives saying, "Do you realize that everything we do God uses to love the church. Even if it's just doing to send our husbands off to church clothed and fed. I don't think there's any other group of women who can say to this extent that God uses absolutely everything in our lives to bless the church because of the way it either supports our husbands or teaches our husbands in ways that help them pastor better."

This is also something you, men, can use to encourage your wives. Even the fact that they go home ahead of you after church, wrestling tired kids and trying to get lunch on the table, while you stay and have an important conversation might seem like a big pain and of little consequence. But a life may have been changed through your conversation as she is trying to boil water for spaghetti and keep the kids under control at the same time.

Your Wife, Your Helper in Flourishing the Family

And the only way you're going to flourish the family while you nourish the church is if you are mindful of your family and decisions about how the ministry impacts your family has them in mind. Your wife is your indispensable helpmate in helping you know how the family is doing and in helping you make good decisions so that you flourish.

A Little Practical Advice

1. Encourage your wife to be honest about her needs and the kids' needs. Encourage her that even if her information causes you to spend less time doing church work that this is exactly what God has in mind and will actually be used to bless the church.

2. Expect change and be vigilant to communicate about it and adjust your family/ministry life accordingly to keep on flourishing. "The one constant in life you can expect is change." What a true statement that is! And because change is such a constant, so will be your need to make new decisions with your wife to balance caring well for your family with caring well for the church.

Have regular times of communication. Nail them down on your calendar and guard that time jealously. a regular time/day to talk, pull out the calendar, make changes, and share transitions you see going on. Stick to these communication dates, if at all possible! Don't let the tyranny of the urgent crowd them out.

Be on the lookout for things in your family, in your lives, in your ministry that change the shape of what you do and when you do it. (And every once in a while, things may change so much that you may need to step back from the ministry.)

3. Have friends to hold you accountable and ask you questions about your life. Have friends older than you as well as friends the same age as you. Both will help you care well for your family in your season of life. Find a designated accountability couple who you both respect and can listen to their advice, especially in times when you and your wife can't come to unity on an important decision.

4. Help your wife understand how important she is in helping you know how to flourish the family. She may be especially insightful with special things the kids are doing/going through that you need to prioritize and even work around your regular schedule to be a part of. It makes sense: if she spends more

of her day around them, observing them, nurturing them, she very well will pick up on things you may miss.

5. Parents aren't fully exchangeable. There are some things the kids don't care if it's mom or dad there. And there's other things that they do care. Especially church plants and turn-around churches, this can be really hard. This is why some families choose to homeschool. It can provide more flexibility that keeps ministry and family time from clashing so much.

Seeing God's Sovereignty When Family Needs Lead to Less Ministry Time

New Boundaries Don't Mean a Downgrade in God's Economy

New balance usually means new boundaries upon what you do. Sometimes these boundaries may be wide and beautiful and easy to accommodate so much ministry, while still flourishing the family. Married couples before they have kids and empty nesters after the kids have gone often experience seasons like this. But many other times, growing family needs may put a squeeze on how, when, and what you do in ministry.

It's easy to feel like your family's needs are creating a downgrade in your ministry in such occasions. And, if it's something your wife is going through that has sparked the squeeze in boundary to better care for her, she can easily feel like she is hampering the gospel and your ministry. But this is where you can encourage yourself and her to lean into God's sovereignty. And that like David in Psalm 16 we can proclaim that the boundaries God has given have fallen in pleasant places.

We have been surprised, repeatedly, how God has used the lessons learned in times of "shrinking" ministry boundaries to actually teach Mark (actually both of us) things that wind up being a huge blessing to his ministry. Once more, the crockpot effect when God uses life to change us and those changes flow out into more fruitful ministry through example, wisdom, powerful preaching, and longing for God.

And once more, so good for the congregation…

Why Your Confidence in God's Sovereignty Matters So Much

Every wife has a tendency to either send their husband out to do too much or to want to hold on him too tight. But most of the ministry wives I found or of that first category: they feel either excited to send their husband out to gospel opportunities or guilty if they don't have them go out to another gospel opportunity. That's why your confidence in God's sovereignty and your encouraging of us to be honest with you with the real needs that we see to flourish the family are actually us helping you do what you're supposed to do not inhibiting you from doing something that God would have you do.

You help us so much when you encourage us that God is doing good things not withholding, good things when greater needs of the family create a "no" for ministry opportunity. This might be one of the greatest gifts of relief you can give.

God Never Wastes Anything

But not only that, we have found that God actually intends that these pull backs which seem to lessen one part of your ministry actually wind up, multiplying something else in your ministry, and often in a different way than you ever imagined. what we found is the Lord uses those changes to make Mark a better pastor, either because the difficulties we are going through as a family change his heart, or change his understanding and give him more wisdom that the Lord will turn and use tell him to Pastor others better, but also to do that third 1 Tim/Titus thing pastor elders are supposed to do: furnish an example.

Flourishing the family circles back round to enrich the other two qualifications of nourishing the church and furnishing a godly example in life and character in leadership. Back to the two ways you teach in your church: how you preach and how you live. Think of how many people are married in your church, and how many with kids. As they watch you limit ministry for the sake of your family, you are setting a good example for them as they balance work and family, too. Think of how many singles will get married in your church. Your example prepares them for decisions they will make in the future. Even singles who never get married still have to think through balancing things in their lives. No one may want you to say "no" to their ministry request because of caring for your family's needs, but you never know what greater gift you are giving them by your example. God is the only infinite one here. All the rest of us are finite.

Leaning into God's Sovereignty Like Never Before

In January 2025, I developed an extremely rare, very debilitating autoimmune condition that first attacked my kidneys and then the nerves in my arms and legs leading to complete paralysis. I spent 100 days in the hospital over seven stays as they searched for the cause and tried to get control or find a cure for it. A team of church ladies took turns coming to the hospital or to our house to help feed me and even scratch my nose, when I was at my worst. The elders of the church came round Mark and helped relieve him of some of his usual ministry obligations in order to have more time to be with me. My husband even cancelled going to the conference that he planned and was to lead celebrating 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea…. And he did this without ever telling me that HE was the one who planned it and was in charge of it! He made not even a peep of disappointment over not being able to go. He knew I would feel bad and he didn't want to add to my sorrows. And, most of all, he 100% firmly believed that for whatever reason, it must be God's sovereign will for him not to be at that conference. And perhaps not surprisingly, last year's difficulties lead to him discussing with others as well as me as to whether it was time for him to completely step down from ministry at beloved Capitol Hill Baptist in order to care for me.

But by the grace of God, the support of our church, and some very smart doctors, we made it through the year, I responded to a drug, which gives me four months relief at a time, instead of two weeks. Yes, I'm still in a wheelchair and using a walker. My hospital bed is in our living room and just a few days ago was the first time in almost a year that I was able to climb stairs. I can only walk for five minutes at a time. But I can do dishes, make dinner, and other household basics. With the help of able-legged friends, I've continued to hold kids' outreach events in our front yard and Children's Ministry workshops during the Pastor Weekenders we hold three times a year. It's not what life used to be, but together, we have found a new balance and a way to flourish our family while Mark continues to nourish the members of Capitol Hill Baptist as their pastor.

And, as the congregation came to our aid, prayed, and watched, the Lord once more did not waste these sorrows and these very severe boundaries. He used them in us and grew us even closer to many in the congregation. I felt like I did far more encouraging of others in the church from the hospital visits than ever before. The hospital staff were amazed at our church's support, and I had multiple chances to share of the hope within me and within those from our church who came to help me.

The Capitol Hill community read about the Lord's faithfulness to me in a letter I gave out in the goody bags when other members of CHBC carried out the Christmas kids' outreach I had planned, while I was completely paralyzed in bed in my living room! My friends' service to the community on my behalf simply made the gospel shine even brighter!

Many commented on the richness of Mark's preaching and prayers throughout the year. Yes, the boundaries were cinched tight on the Dever's, but they still fell in pleasant places (Psalm 16:6) And surely

God's goodness and mercy did follow us all the days of 2025 and continue to do so into 2026 and will until we dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23:6).

I share this as encouragement to you, dear pastor/husbands that you can trust God's sovereignty even when the boundaries to flourish your family cinch tightly on your ability to nourish the church. Especially those of you with wives with chronic health conditions. The Lord knows what He's doing! He is completely trustworthy!

Marriage-Shaped Ministry Fuels a Heart of Ministry-Shaped Marriage

Mark's willingness to have a marriage-shaped ministry and to NOT make the needs of his family feel like a detour away from God's good plan to use him to equip the church is actually one of the things that makes my heart for the ministry and willingness to sacrifice for God's people grow. Because I'm not envious of the church or hate the church because I'm not a "wife on the side" and she's not the mistress. Because my husband esteems me and even makes decisions to flourish me, his bride, it helps the church be the bride who we both love and sacrifice for.

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 that 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 its seem 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.

Marvelous. Messy. Ministry. 40+ Years, Looking Back

This year, 2026, marks forty-four years of marriage and ministry, and thirty-two years of ministry here at Capitol Hill Baptist Church. So, I thought it would be a good time to reflect on our particular version of marvelous, messy ministry. I'm sure there will be some things in your lives that resonate with the things I'm about to share from our marriage in ministry experiences. But I'm just as sure there will be things that do not resonate with your marriage in ministry experiences. My hope is that the Lord might use my reflections upon these past four decades to leave you with a few things to think about and most of all to leave you encouraged that the same God who has been faithful to us every step of the path marked out for us, will be just as faithful to you.

DUKE (1978-1982)

Mark and I met at Duke University through the great Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship that was on campus at that time. The late '70's were the heyday for Inter-Varsity. Lots of great books, great speakers, and great conferences: Knowing God by J. I. Packer, Basic Christianity by John Stott, Urbana Missions Conference, being a few examples.

For me, as someone who became a Christian as a child, but who had very little good teaching either at home or at church, the time at Duke was when I first really understood what discipleship meant and had the opportunity to be deeply grounded in God's Word. It was a very important time for Mark, too. Mark came to Duke already growing as a Christian, but the preaching at the local church where we both attended as well as the teaching and leadership in the Inter-Varsity chapter shaped his theology in some significant ways and set him on a path towards seminary, instead of law school and/or politics. And, I would have to say that that grounding we received in college helped make our relationship with God and study of His Word the bedrock on which we would grow our lives together and weather the storms that were to come, and come far sooner than we imagined.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

So, my first piece of advice to you would be this: there is no one or no thing that can replace or compare to the mighty power of God and His Word. Keep your relationship with Him growing. Don't let the tyranny of the urgent be the pattern of your life that keeps you from finding time to spend with God. In ministry, it is so easy to fill up your life with all sorts of good things and all sorts of urgent needs that you see and coast along on your relationship with God and what you know about Him already from your times in His Word. Don't make a life of coasting. Make a life of building. Make sure you are sitting regularly under the preaching of God's Word. Find time to spend with God. Work together with your spouse to carve out times for you each to grow and strengthen your relationship with the Lord.

Martin Luther once said that theology, which is just Greek for the study of God, is not dry heady stuff but it's how you live and how you die. Study God. Know Him. Be like the godly man-tree in Psalm One whose roots go deep, who bears fruit in every season and does not wither. You will need it all for what life brings.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. How would you describe your time with the LORD right now? Dry or rich?
2. Are there any particular circumstances that make it difficult for you to have a quiet time on your own or regularly hear the preaching of God's Word? If so, can you and your husband think of ways to help you have these times of spiritual nourishment?
3. How has spending time with God and His Word helped you be prepared for times of difficulty?

GORDON CONWELL (1982-1986)

So, Mark and I graduated from Duke, got married, and headed up to Topsfield, Massachusetts, a little town not far from Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. This would be our home for the next four years as Mark worked on an M.Div.

And you know how I said those storms were going to hit us a little bit sooner than I thought they might? Well, here they come. We had a pretty rocky start up in Massachusetts. With few good examples of marriage from our own upbringing and with just a little premarital counseling, marriage was a shock, and we had a lot of bumps. Things seemed so hard to us that at one point, about eight weeks into marriage, we decided that God surely was going to take one of us home soon, because there was no way we could continue the way things were going, and divorce was not an option.

Now looking back, I'm not so sure what we went through was harder than what many new-married couples go through. But the thing is, we were the first to get married, we had moved to a new area where we knew very few people, it was very hard to find a good church, Mark was starting full-time school and very involved in classes, and I for the first time in my life, I wasn't a student and hadn't figured out yet what I was supposed to do with this new phase of my life. Then, I got a very bad case of mono which laid me low for months.

What a lot of changes! But at the time, I didn't see all those pieces. To me, it seemed the problem was that I had apparently married an alien who was very occupied in a galaxy far, far away called seminary, and speed of light travel had not yet been invented. There was so much we didn't understand about men and women in general, and about Mark and Connie in particular. And because we were at the bottom of these learning curves, was easy to think everything was difficult only because of marriage aches and pains, compounded by Mark being so involved in seminary studies.

We did begin to figure out some basic things that helped, such as: any "discussion" that begins after 9 PM must be tabled to the next day and other basic ground rules (for us, we knew if we were going to have a disagreement, and it started after nine it would almost always lead to an argument and tears. When if we would only wait to be a bit more rested, the outcome usually was much more productive and much less emotional).

And, Mark was beginning to learn being a student as a single person is a very different from being a student as a married person. He decided to slow down his study pace and finish in four years instead of three years. Also, he brought me into his studies by reading aloud to me some of the things he was studying so that I could learn along with him. And I audited some seminary classes. These helped some of my loneliness and helped me grow in some of the ways he was growing.

But the truth is, when we got married, we didn't JUST leave behind with our lives as single people. We left behind so many other aspects of life, too. We were living in a new part of the country. We were looking for a new church. We were looking for new friends. We were looking for other married couples. We were looking at a new way of life – – Mark and seminary, and me trying to figure out what the world I was going to do. And really, when we began to establish new versions of these lifelines into our life in Massachusetts, suddenly, our marriage improved. It wasn't because we became such quick learners in the school of marriage and "fixed all our problems." It was because the whole problem wasn't marriage.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT
When you go through a transition remind yourself of all the different things that are changing and don't blame it all on the ministry or your husband or your location or whatever it is that you are upset about in

your new situation. Be aware of these different strands and which ones have gone missing in your transition. It can be super easy to place so many demands on a single lifeline, such as your marriage, that can be unreasonable, unpractical, or even untenable. Yes, your new situation will absolutely mean you will need to work together even more to help each other thrive. There will be different ways you do things to help you through this transition time. You can be huge supports to each other.
But chances are your marriage can't be a complete replacement for all those other lifelines that were so firmly and helpfully established in your be established in your new situation. Stick close to God and His Word.

He is the one lifeline that is always there and can bear all things and help YOU bear all things, even this transition. Pray and ask God to grow new versions of these lifelines into your new situation. Strategize and work together to establish them, and most of all, be patient as they develop in your new situation. This will help you be kind to each other and will help you have hope on days your discouraged at what you used to have but don't have yet. Think a YEAR!

And, as you transition into this new situation, establishing these new lifelines (work schedule, friends, church, culture, maybe even language, if you're going overseas, etc.) you may very well depend a little bit more on the lifelines you established from where you just came from. Not as a permanent fix, but as a help and encouragement as you build in those more permanent lifelines right there where you are settling. So, you may have more phone calls with close friends back in back where you lived before as you are still in process of finding and developing strong friends right where you are. And I would suggest both you and your husband doing this, and even regularly scheduling telephone conversations with old friends who know you well. You can even come up with a set of questions you want them to ask you, such as:

1. What is hard for you, your husband, your kids, etc. since we last talked?
2. What has been something good that has happened?
3. What is different from where you were before?
4. How many transitions can you identify?
5. What have you figured out to help your family through any of these?
6. How has God shown His faithfulness to you through these?
7. How can I pray for you and your family?

You want a set of questions that help you identify the difficulties, see the good things, address the hard things, and always reflect on God's goodness and faithfulness, even through the hardest issues.

I like to think of this process of transition being "leaving and cleaving." You want to be putting more of your heart in your new situation and cleave there. You don't want to leave your heart in your last situation. That being said, leaving and cleaving is often more of a process than a "one and done" event. You can find strength from the people/place you left as you are growing into your current situation. It is sort of tricky to both get strength from the old and start transferring your affection. But may help to treat your friends who know you as those who send you out and treat you sort of as their supported workers is there helping you establish new ties where you're going.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU
1. Have you ever been tempted to blame a difficult transition on just one aspect when there are really more than one element at play? What aspect did you blame? What other aspects were at play?
2. Are you facing a transition right now or about to face one? What lifelines are changing/will change with this transition? (Friends, church, culture, etc.) Which ones are the hardest for you? Are there any

lifelines from your previous situation that can support you as you slowly get established in your new situation?
3. How has God shown Himself faithful even through difficult aspects of transition?

THREE BIG CHANGES: CHURCH, CHILD, and CARL

There were three other big changes that happened in Massachusetts that would have a big impact on our lives: Mark became involved in his first pastoral position, we had our first child, and Mark met Carl Henry who would influence the direction of the rest of our lives really.

CHURCH

Mark's first pastoral position was co-pastoring a tiny little church plant in our tiny little town of Topsfield Massachusetts. It was a very friendly situation in many ways. There was really no gospel witness in our little town and a number of evangelicals who really wanted to leave behind the little churches they were involved in and covenant together as a gospel preaching church. And even though I was a pastor's wife for the first time at that point, it certainly did not feel that way. We were all just friends gathering together as a church on Sunday. So easy and so few expectations on me other than what would be expected of any member.

But it's where I first began to feel the rub of having my husband be pastor in terms of parenting in the pew on my own. We met in the City Hall and there certainly were no childcare facilities and since we were the only one with the child, I was always in childcare. We finally figured out a way to set up a baby monitor so that I can listen from the next room only to find out the next day that the monitor frequency was the same as the liberal church's wireless mic system and that in the middle of their service Mark's voice suddenly blared through with his preaching. Oops! So much for creative ingenuity coming to the rescue!

CHILD

Our dear little child also had an impact on our ministry in another way. We had had pretty much an open-door policy at our house and especially the younger members felt free to come over any time, assuming they would be greeted with a full welcome. But now with our little girl, my energy was divided, and I was not nearly as available. There were many grumbles from these younger members who did not understand why even when our daughter was down for a nap it might not be a good time for them to come over. Some of the grumbles were such that they were never resolved during our time there. It was hard to be misunderstood. It was hard for others to think I didn't care as much now that we had our daughter, when that wasn't true at all. We knew though that my primary job was going to be using what energy I had to care for our family even if that meant I didn't have as much to give to others in the way I used to. It was not too many years later that one of those younger members reached out to me when she had her children and then understood our decisions so much better. She apologized and it was a very sweet moment.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

This is just one example of the ways your family needs may change what you are able to give others. But, even though it changes what you're able to give, it doesn't mean you have stopped giving. First of all, by my husband encouraging me that it was good in right to set up a new boundary that was reflective of our new family needs, I was teaching this young member something. We like to teach by yeses, but we can teach by no's as well. She was learning about good leadership from a husband to care well for family. It was hard to be misunderstood, but it was a good model, and she remembered it for years... and so have I. I like to say pastors teach not just by preaching but also by their lives. This was one of those instances when Mark and I were teaching by our lives. We are finite and we are called to be good stewwards

according to the best wisdom we have from God's Word, form our best counsel we seek, and from the best we can figure out.

And at the end of the day, we stand before the Lord with those decisions, and we trust Him to bear good fruit from them in our lives and even out into the lives of others, even those who don't understand. These decisions for our families' good are just the beginning of many times when we make decisions that were not appreciated or understood by others. Some of these were later further understood as good and right. Many of these we've had to entrust to our good Creator and bear being misunderstood. It's our job to respond even to those who misunderstand with 1 Corinthians 13 love. Welcome to Marvelous. Messy. Ministry!

QUESTIONS FOR YOU
1. Have you experienced a life change that has changed what your involvement in ministry looks like? Did members of your church have a hard time understanding? How did you help them understand your new limits?
2. Where do you/your family especially feel their "finiteness" when it comes to needs the church has? What helps you respond in love, even when your ministry changes are misunderstood by the congregation?
3. Have you ever seen the Lord use the limits on your life help others learn how to live well themselves?

CARL

Okay, that takes care of those first two big things but there is the third one: Carl Henry. You may not know that Carl Henry was extremely important theologian during most of the 20th century. He was one of the few thoughtful, well-educated, academic theologians who stood upon the inerrancy of God's Word when so many were shooting holes through that idea. Much of the evangelical world true to the gospel today stands in part upon the shoulders of his good academic work.

Needless to say, when Carl Henry came to speak at Gordon Conwell, the students, including Mark, were in awe of him and his good work. What a privilege to hear him in person! One thing that I appreciate about my husband is his willingness to treat people as people regardless of their accomplishments or positions. So, he went up to Dr. Henry and ask for time to talk with him. The two hit it off quite well and over the years became regular correspondents and friends.

But perhaps the most important thing from this first meeting at Gordon Conwell was that Dr. Henry encouraged Mark to get a PhD and teach historical theology at one of the Southern Baptist seminaries, especially encouraging him towards Southern in Louisville. At this time, there was a lot of liberal influences at that seminary. The only way to study or to teach good theology there, at that time, was to study/teach historical theology. So, Dr. Henry was encouraging my husband to be a little bit like a Trojan horse and seek to become a professor of historical theology at Southern and so be an influence for the gospel there among the men training to be the future pastors and southern Baptist churches. This idea resonated with Mark, and this became the new target. Not pastoring. but professoring to impact future pastors.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT
Don't just stand in awe of people whose books you've read or whose talk you've listened to and been encouraged by. (And that definitely includes my husband, Mark, if he is one in that category for you.) They are just plain, ole people, and chances are, they are plain, ole GODLY people, and they probably have wisdom to share with you. And they need friends and encouragement, too. Chances are you will encourage them every bit as much as they will encourage you.

As a funny aside, it is this attitude that led my husband to invite J.I. Packer to dinner at our humble little house when he was visiting Gordon Conwell. I'll never forget the phone calls about two hours before dinner from Mark… "So, do you think we could have someone over for dinner tonight? What about J.I. Packer?" I must say I was a bit nervous. But I also must say, sure enough he was just a plain, ole godly man. And he also became a good friend for many, many years.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. Is there anyone you respect and whose ministry has benefited you that you might encourage through an email or in person?
2. Is there anyone who you might be shy to reach out to because they seem too "important"?

SBTS (1986-1988)

(Southern Baptist Theological Seminary)

This new plan to teach at Southern needed a PhD and more. It also meant we needed time at a Southern Baptist institution and at a "real" Southern Baptist church. Up to this point, I grew up Presbyterian, (though through my reading Scripture was baptistic even then), we both attended a Presbyterian church at Duke because it had the best preaching (we weren't members), attended a Congregational church in our little town of Topsfield, and then planted a little Southern Baptist Church, though it looked nothing like a standard Southern Baptist Church. And Gordon Conwell was interdenominational seminary, with far more Presbyterians than Baptists. In truth, the last, really Southern Baptist thing Mark had done was briefly attend a Southern Baptist church his first year at Duke. Given all this, why in the world would a Southern Baptist institution ever want to hire someone who seemed to be so washed clean of his distinctly Southern Baptist associations. So, off to Louisville, Kentucky, Southern seminary, and my first real Southern Baptist Church it was to establish ties.

Our time at Southern was very brief. Mark was able to complete the coursework and his thesis in a year and a half. But what an extremely important year and a half it was! For me, I was introduced to a whole new culture within the Southern Baptist Church we attended. Back then, healthy churches were extremely scarce if not nonexistent in the Louisville area. Praise the Lord that is not the case today! I knew I had entered a new world when I went out to lunch with the wife of a seminary couple we had met at church. After I excitedly told her I the story how I became a Christian, she responded with, "Yes, but when did you become Southern Baptist?" I thought to myself "Wow… This is different." Part of me was turned off by this. It seemed like the emphasis was in the wrong place. And I don't think I was entirely wrong.

But here's the thing, she was seeking honest friendship, and she was asking an honest question. I had two choices: I could decide "She doesn't get me at all, and I don't know that we can really be much of friends given how different we are and the perspectives we come from." Or, I could decide: "Here somebody very different for me, but she seeking to be an honest friend. let's be friends together and learn from each other." I am so thankful to say that Mark and I both took the second approach. This couple retained their differences in perspective in many ways throughout our whole relationship. And I'm sure they felt the difference in our perspective, too.

But we learned from each other, and we grew from knowing each other. And we served and loved each other. It was so important for me to see how much I could learn from someone different from me. It was important for me to see that I can be friends with someone so different for me. And that friendship isn't just about being the same it's also about growing from each other.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

This has been an important lesson that has served me well over all of our years, especially our years in churches. To not just look for and get close to the people most like me, but to see what I can learn and even possibly what I can teach to people who are not like me. I'm not saying that there might not be someone more like me whose shared perspective leads to an even closer friendship. But what I am saying is, there's pretty much no one that I cannot learn from and cannot be an encouragement to. God has created them, and He has made their lives in my life's cross. God can bring something good, even something quite from someone who is not like me.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. Do you have friends who are more like you or different from you?
2. How has each kind of friend been helpful?
3. What helps you be friends with people who are not like you?

ANOTHER FRIENDSHIP

The other extremely important friendship that came out of this time was Mark becoming friends with Al Mohler. Al Mohler was a PhD student at Southern the same time Mark was doing his ThM. They became fast friends who spurred each other on theologically and encouraged each other to play some part in helping bring spiritual health to churches, pastors, and future pastors. It's of friendship that has for much good fruit and is lasted even through to today.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

It would be easy to dismiss a year and a half as a blink of an eye and friendships made during that time of such a short expiration date that you might not pour into where you are or who you are with. But you never know how the Lord might use that friendship and even bigger ways and for even more years than you could ever imagine. Never use length of time as a way to value the worth of a relationship. Pour yourself in to where you are and who is around you. Every day is a gift. Every person is a life filled with good works prepared for them and you may be part of God's plan to use that person with those good works to do amazing things. I would say Al's and Mark's relationship has been something of a lifeline, especially during the days when the SBC, in general, and Southern, in particular, was being transformed and a bit of a battlefield. They have helped each other in so many ways.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. Is the place you live/church you are see a lot of short-term residents? Or, have you ever had a short-term move? Are you tempted to avoid making deep relationships in these circumstances? What might help you establish friendship in these circumstances?
2. Can you think of a time when you had a short-term friend that has had a big impact upon you? What was that big impact?

STRONG-WILLED WARS

While I was getting use to the Southern Baptist world on the outside, I was getting used to life with a very strong-willed little girl inside our home. I was grateful that the transition to life in Louisville was so much easier for us on the marriage front because we needed all the unity and understanding we could get as we tackled the force of nature that was our child. I remember one afternoon after church we put her in her bed to take a nap and told her she must stay there. For the next three hours Mark and I tag teamed putting her back on the bed and telling her to stay there.

It was a very reasonable request. It was nap time. She was tired. But in her mind, it wasn't time for a nap, it was time for World War Three. It felt like she would never obey, but we just kept putting her back on my bed and telling her to stay there over and over and over. At last, she did obey.

Our spicy little girl continued to do things like this OFTEN on for many years. No, when she grew up it wasn't staying on her bed for a nap. But it was other things. Few of the things in themselves were a big deal. After all, will world peace be impacted if she didn't stay on her bed during nap time? No way. But our daughter, herself, would say that one of the most important things that we did for her was to follow through. When we told her to do something, and it was reasonable, we followed through until she did it. If she spoke disrespectfully to us, and she knew she wasn't supposed to, we addressed the behavior. While ago we had a conversation about this, she said "Thank you so much for being consistent with your

discipline of me. I can't imagine how I would've turned out without it! And make sure you tell other parents to love their little, strong-willed kids with loving correction, too. It's the kindest thing you can do for them."

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

First of all, know the difference between asking your child to do something and telling your child to do something. Asking looks like: "Would you like to set the table, or would you like to pick up your toys?" Telling is like "Would you please set the table or would you please pick up your toys." Don't ask something that you want them to do. Ask them something when they have a choice. Tell them when it is something you want them to do and there is no choice. And then, when you do tell them to do something, make sure you follow through and that they do it. Be very careful about what you tell your children to do, because when you tell them to do it, you need to make sure you have strength to follow through. Amd do beware of the trend to do away with having children obey you, but simply persuade them that what you want them to do is actually what they want to do. Your discipline of children is what builds self-discipline in them later. Asking kids to obey you can be "gentle" and authority can be good. Give these gifts to your children that will last a lifetime!

Why am I telling you this? Isn't this supposed to be a talk on ministry life? Why am I bringing kids and discipline into this? Because one of the three things our husbands are called to do to be qualified to be a pastor/elder and to remain a pastor/elder is to manage their families well. And one of the ways our husbands are going to do that, and we are going to help them do that, is to follow through consistently with discipline. I am not surprised when kids disobey or possibly speak disrespectfully to their parents. But what I am surprised at is how many times parents don't follow through or they don't address behavior. And I'm not saying that if parents address behavior, then immediately their children never disobey or are disrespectful again. I just gave you an example of having to put Annie back on her bed for three hours. And I'm telling you, that was not the last time we had to fight with keeping her on her bed at nap time. I'm just trying to encourage you that consistently addressing a behavior even if it's all day, every day, week after week, month after month, year after year, is one of the best, most loving gifts that you can give your kids. Don't take my word for it. Just ask my daughter at 41! She's one who wanted me to make sure to say this to you!

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. Do you have difficulty following through with disciplining your children? What makes it difficult? Is there any way your husband and you can better work together in disciplining your children?
2. Do you mix up "asking" and "telling" your children to do something?
3. Any words of encouragement for others who are facing especially tough discipline battles with their kids?

CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND (1988-1994)

With ThM completed, Mark, our daughter, and I boarded a plane and headed to Cambridge, England for the next and final leg of our adventures in schooling. Last stop: a PhD in historical theology, studying about a wonderful Puritan named Richard Sibbes. Now, PhD's in Cambridge are different from American PhD's. There is no classwork there's only a dissertation. You pass or you fail. It's a very all or nothing thing. So, one of the reasons why Mark chose Richard Sibbes was he was such a wonderful example of a man who taught his congregation deeply and pastored them tenderly. This was exactly what Mark hoped to emulate. So, Mark wanted to study Richard Sibbes because he figured even if he did not pass and get a PhD he would've had the opportunity to study a man who would be a great role model. That was something he could count on taking that home with him, whether he had a diploma to put up on the wall or not.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

There are so many outcomes in life that we cannot affect, no matter how hard we try. There are so many outcomes that we pray for, work for, and hope for. But what we can do is squeeze the most out of each day and be faithful with what we've been given. We leave to God that outcome. Fortunately, Mark did passing get his PhD while in Cambridge. But frankly, all those nights when he would read me passages from Bruised Read and Smoking Flax did good to his heart and to mine. And I believe Mark really is a different pastor because of who he studied.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. Is there any upcoming future event you are hanging your hopes on, but do not have control over?
2. How can you be a good steward of today even as you wait and hope for that future event?

MORE CAMBRIDGE OPPORTUNITIES

But that PhD on Richard Sibbes in Cambridge brought some other opportunities that would be of even greater impact upon our lives. And much of it centered around the church we joined while we were there: Eden Baptist Church. It was there that we experienced for the first time many of the things that you see when you come to Capitol Hill Baptist Church. Long, solid expositional preaching. Gatherings of godly men and women of all ages who love the Lord and sought to encourage one another in discipleship. A board of elders who led the congregation with wisdom and patience.

First, Mark and I simply attended as members. But soon, we had been adopted as a son and daughter by some of the older godly members (Fred and Elizabeth Catherwood), which was especially wonderful for us, as we did not grow up with distinctly Christian parents. Mark then was invited to preach, then later recognized as an elder, and then when he finished his PhD, was voted in as an associate pastor. Mark would tell you that sitting in on those elders' meetings and listening to those seasoned men work through issues with such godliness had a huge impact on his pastoring that has blessed us even to today. Many of the Nine Marks came as a result to what Mark observed, and we enjoyed in our time at this church.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Funny how on your way to doing what you think you're supposed to do, you can wind up learning things "on the side" that significantly change your life in ways you never imagined. The PhD in Cambridge was not the greatest gift in our time there. It was the people, especially the older people, who poured into us and influenced us. Do the work God is giving you to do but learn from the people God is put around you. I know everyone's used to thinking about God's Word and spending time in prayer with God as the two major spirituals food groups by which we grow. But make sure you add God's people in there, too.

The Bible is filled of examples of this third spiritual food group. So many times, it is God's people who are the means of God applying His Word to our lives in a fruitful way.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU
1. What "side" blessings have you seen God bring to you that you never expected?
2. How has God used His people to feed you spiritually?
3. Are there any older Christians who have poured into you? How could you encourage them with how they have blessed you? Could you be an older Christian who could pour into someone else?

KID CHANGE 1

There were two important changes to our family during this time, too. First of all, it got bigger and busier. I gave birth to our son. With Mark busy on his PhD and juggling church responsibilities it would be easy for him to be in the zone until early dinner and back at it after dinner, coming down to eat a distracted meal with us in between. To me it looked obvious that I had more than I could handle, he should see that, and offer to help me without me saying anything. However, it was not that way in his head. I would tell him that I needed help but that he would get in the middle what he was doing, and he would forget what time it was. There was frustration for quite a while as I depended upon his spontaneity to come to my rescue. Then Mark had a idea: he put on his schedule at 5 PM to stop work
and asked me if there is anything he could do to be helpful. It's been many years since those days, but you know he still has that on his schedule!

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT
Spontaneity is wonderful, but it can be overrated. Mark wanted to be helpful. The point did not need to be that Mark thought up the how and when of that helpfulness on his own. Help the helper help you. Learn his strengths and weaknesses. Chances are he wants to help you. You just may have to help him figure out a way to help you. This has come up over and over in our years in ministry. Me expecting my husband to be a mind reader seeing my needs instead of me just humbly explaining in us working together to find a way to both take care of us and to care well for the church.
Also, use encouragement to help your husband rather than nagging, especially in areas where he is weak. After all, even when someone is willing and even sees they need to do more/improve in an area, it may take a while for that to become second nature. If you see your husband trying to help you or be thoughtful in some way, especially in a new way, appreciate his efforts! Mark calls my encouragement "the wind in his sails." He says it's one of the best things I can do for him. And I'm guessing your husband is not too different from mine!

QUESTIONS FOR YOU
1. Are there any areas where you regularly could use your husband's help, have told him that, and yet he keeps forgetting? Or are there areas like that where your husband could regularly use your help, but you keep forgetting? How could you add a prompt into your life to help you each remember those things?
2. Do you rate spontaneity higher than scheduling? Are there ways in which you and your husband could be helped by valuing the benefit of scheduling more?
3. How could you and your husband encourage one another in ways you have tried/succeeded in responding with the help you need from each other?

KID CHANGE 2

Another important family change came through our daughter who, as she grew to school age, became a source of much learning for us. I know I mentioned that she was gifted with a rather strong will. She was also crazy wiggly. We tried to work around the wiggly but sometimes there were some pretty big collisions. Especially around things like catechisms. Young children have minds like steel traps and Mark wisely wanted to capitalize upon that superpower. So, he found a catechism for very little children and started doing it with our daughter. Unfortunately, we didn't know the best way to use a catechism with a very wiggly child. We didn't know it yet, but Annie had dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity, and this was making learning the catechism in the traditional way very difficult for her. We chalked it up to regular childishness and persevered in the catechistical force feeding it seemed to have become. What we called perseverance led to what our daughter later called panic… as in panic attack. The three of us laugh about it now, but not then.

As our daughter's schooling continued, her extra challenges became clear. And as we understood the impact of these upon how she learned, we learned to separate mode from goal. The mode was a catechism. The goal was to teach our child truth. We eventually changed our format to other forms of teaching the same truths that worked better for her. And thanks to these experiences, a very important concept in education began to form that would impact me for many years as I began to write children's curriculum as well as thought about how to teach truth to our own children. I call it the Triple Crown of teaching truth. And the three elements are understandable, enjoyable, and memorable. Teach in a way the kids can understand. Teach in a way that's enjoyable so they want to learn more. And teach with enough repetition that the truth becomes memorable and stays with them.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

I would encourage you to think about those elements as you teach your children. It may not always be possible for all three of those to be part of your teaching. But when they are, I promise you the truths that you long to get in your children will more easily get in the places you want them to go and will stay there longer. Being aware of our daughter's extra challenges also impacted our discipline of her and what we expected of her. We became more discriminating about what we asked of her. Some behaviors are desired, but not necessary. Other behaviors are desired and necessary. Both sets of behaviors might be possible for some children, but not for our daughter. We began to sift through these.

Here's an example: when she was still quite little there were others who were expected to stay seated at the table for very long dinners. While we didn't let her get up and move around freely without being asked, we were aware it would be better if she would be allowed to get up sooner and quietly play in a undistracted way instead of fidgeting at the table. Some of her special needs became lenses to help us continue to discipline her but in a way that understood her.

I bring this up because while not all of us have "clinically diagnosed" special needs children, all of our children have bents that make certain things easier and others harder. It never hurts for us to understand these bents in our children, not to let them "get away with things" that others aren't allowed to get away with, but in order to strategize how to better help them obey and be disciplined without exasperating them. When you make a way for your child to be able to obey you because you are aware of their frame, it does encourage them to want to obey and to try to obey and it's a beautiful display of God's particular care for all His creatures. The same God who knows when every sparrow falls and knows the number of hairs on their heads is displayed in parents who are sensitive to their children and use that sensitivity to beckon them towards the right things. And I would say that this specific care and tenderness helps soften hearts to hear the gospel.

And again, what is this have to do with the ministry? I will once more remind you those qualified to be elders are to manage their households well and this might be a key to helping your husbands manage your household well so that you all might flourish as a family in the ministry.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. What differences do you notice in your children? How do those differences impact how your children learn most easily?
2. Are there ways you can help your child to struggle less and learn in a more enjoyable, effective way?
3. How have you and your husband helped each other understand how to use your children's strengths and weaknesses to improve their ability to learn? Can you think of anyone else who might be a helpful advisor as you seek to teach your child?

GETTING TO CHBC (1993-1994)

(Capitol Hill Baptist Church)

I mentioned that Eden Baptist Church in our experiences there were crucial in formulating the Nine Marks that have become foundational to much of what the Lord has used Mark to do. Much of that formulation came from a positive witness at Eden. But a little bit it came from a negative witness. Eden became a "multi-site" church with three locations during our time there. The senior pastor and Mark, as associate pastor, filled the three pulpits between the two of them every Sunday. Originally, this morning pulpit commute was only to last a little while until each church plant was well-established. But the vision changed and the plan was to be multi-site and for the pastors to continue to preach all three congregations.

Some of the members' meetings felt like a tug-of-war as the three gatherings had increasingly three different sets of needs. Eden wanted Mark to stay on as associate pastor, but Mark felt strongly against this multi-site model. A church is those who gather together. This was three, separate gatherings, and therefore three separate churches. This did two things: it helped him formulate more of the ideas behind the Nine Marks. And, it set him up to consider Carl Henry's suggestion in the letter that came around that time.

You see, Carl Henry was a member at a church in Washington, DC called Capitol Hill Metropolitan Baptist Church a.k.a. CHBC before the word Metropolitan got dropped. For years, Carl Henry had been encouraging Mark towards teaching at Southern Seminary in Louisville. But Al Mohler had taken the reins and was doing a heroic job of turning round the seminary and bringing in gospel- centered professors. Mark and his PhD were not needed as a Trojan horse entering the bastions of liberal theology. And on top of this, Carl Henry's church needed a pastor. The previous pastor had had to step down due to adultery. The church was hurting and searching for what would happen next. It of been dwindling in size and some thought it should just be close down. But there were others, including Dr. Henry, who felt otherwise. Enter Carl Henry's letter asking Mark if he would consider submitting his name to the pastor search committee. Mark agreed.

The committee was not impressed by Mark on paper. Mark was 10 years younger than anyone who they were interested in. I think they wanted a seasoned superstar. But Mark was headed to the States to do some teaching the summer of 1993 and he offered to come, fill their pulpit and preach. They accepted. Mark preached that Sunday, and suddenly, the committee was impressed. Questions and answers followed. Mark's heart was turned. He felt like this is where the Lord would have go next.

So, what did Mark do next when he flew back to Cambridge? Did he simply tell me this was it? No, he did not. Along with his robust views on was a healthy church, Mark had grown robust views on what healthy pastor's family would look like. When he looked at those key passages on qualifications for pastors in 1Timothy 3 and Titus 1, he saw three things that we've come to call Marriage-shaped Ministry. Those passages point to overseers/elder/pastors showing three sets of qualities: they NOURISH the church with God's Word, they FURNISH the church with godly leadership in a godly example, and they FLOURISH their family by managing them well and caring for their needs. Mark was firmly convinced that if this church in Washington, DC was where God wanted him to pastor, then God would also make it a place for his family could flourish.

So, instead of telling me how excited he was and how convinced he was that this is where the Lord would have us go, he asked me if I would be willing to fly to DC check out the area (especially schools for our daughter), meet the church and speak with the pastoral search committee. This would be the next concrete step in knowing if this was God's will for us.

I cannot tell you how much this meant to me. Mark had always said "A church can always get another pastor, but I am not supposed to get another wife." He knew my heart was the "bookends" of Proverbs 31: to do my husband good all my days (31:12) and to fear the Lord (31:30). With that ministry-shaped heart in place, he sent me to DC to see if and Capitol Hill Baptist Church I could see away for our marriage and our family to fit the shape of that ministry in a way that we would flourish.

As you might have guessed, this trip, this church, this possibility was quite the sea change from being a professor's family in Louisville, Kentucky. Yes, I had been a senior pastor's wife long ago at that tiny little church plant in Massachusetts. And yes, I had been an associate pastor's wife at Eden Baptist in Cambridge, but in both of those places there were basically no expectations on me. And, we had come up from the ranks having been members and then Mark was recognized as a pastor.

This time everything was different. This was meeting with the pastoral search committee. This was a church filled with people who I didn't know and who didn't know me. This felt like the real deal, and I was scared. I had never thought I could be a real senior pastor's wife, but here I was, going to check it out.

Back in those days there were a lot of "gray hairs," a few families, and a few college students, a few of which are still members here at CHBC today. Some helpful members drove me around the DC area, checking out schools and other things to see if we could fit here. I believed we could. Yes, there was a lot of crime. But there was a lot of possibilities. And even though I was scared, God gave me a heart of love for these people. Like my husband, I was drawn to them. We took the next steps in pursuing this pastorate.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Mark's confidence that God's calling HIM to pastor a particular church would include providing ME and OUR CHILDREN with a good fit was so important! Matter of fact, it was BIBLICAL! And this attitude that the kids and I were the non-negotiable even in the face of a situation he really desired, highlighted his love for us. This was a love that would stop him from even going to DC to CHBC, if need be. And, it was a love that I knew would continue to care for us well, even as we were about to step into it. I especially needed that knowing how scared I was to be a senior pastor's wife.

Talk through the passages in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Consider together what it might mean for you in your current situation, or in a future church situation. Come back and review these on a regular basis, especially as your family or your church goes through changes. Flourishing looks different as life changes. Pray and encourage one another. This may be one of the most important things you can do to continue in the ministry for years to come.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. How does it help you to know that God's calling your husband into ministry also means that the needs of your family help confirm that calling?
2. What kinds of things did you look for/do you look for to help you know if a ministry situation might be a good fit for your family?
3. What does it mean for your family to flourish, even while in the ministry?
4. How can you encourage your husband in his care for you and your family, even as he is also seeking to nourish the church? Are there other ways that you can work together as a couple to flourish your family even more?

SETTLING IN AT CHBC (1994)

(Capitol Hill Baptist Church)

Well, you know how the story ends. We did wind up here Capitol Hill Baptist Church the following summer and have been here ever since. The name of our church changed while we were here, losing that middle word "Metropolitan". But even more importantly, the church changed in essence as well.

Here's some of the ways it has changed:

- Changed from a church of 130 mainly elderly people who joined by going forward to a church (and some of whom were probably not truly converted) to a church with 800 mostly 25–40-year-olds who join through membership classes.

- Changed from a church with a senior pastor only to one with multiple associate and assistant pastors, as well as other pastoral staff.

- Changed from a church led by a few deacons to a church led by many lay and staff elders.

- Changed from a church with short sermons and an hour-long service toa church with hour-long sermons and two-hour-long services.

- Changed from the church with lots of programs to a church with few programs but committed to gathering together for both a Sunday am and Sunday pm service.

- Changed from a church with very few kids and almost no youth group, to lots of kids and a vibrant youth group.

- Changed from a church with a choir, special music, organ, and children's choir to a church led by very mere instrumentation and who IS the choir, even singing the last verse of many songs a cappella.

- Changed from the church who has its covenant hanging on the wall to one who speaks it to one another every month and lives it out every day and deliberate discipleship and care for one another.

- Changed from a church who thought they would close their doors to a church that has grown and has weathered many storms, and who opens their doors to many from around the world to see what a healthy church with a committed congregation and dedicated pastors, looks like. And, who sends out many of their pastors to speak elsewhere and impact other churches even around the world.

These are just some of the changes bring us to the church that gathers at 525 A Street, NE in Washington DC today.

Wow! So much change! Some elements, others desire to emulate. Others will be distinctives of life here at our particular church, with our particular congregation and pastors. I am so grateful for any good changes that have come. Praise God for them all. He gets the glory. After all, we are simply a church of ordinary sinners who all need a Savior and by the grace of God are being transformed slowly but surely into the likeness of that Savior, seeking to faithfully live out God's Word.

GROWING PAINS

But do know that all these changes also have come with growing pains that our family has felt and continues to navigate. Here's some of growing pains we experienced with these changes and hopefully some encouragement for you, too, if you experience them.

CHANGE IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP (especially the change from deacons to elders)

This was one of the most painful times of our time here at CHBC. While many were in favor of this change, there were those who were matted Mark for something completely unrelated and decided to "blackball" the vote by rallying people who were still considered members but had not attended church for quite a while. They succeeded, and the vote failed. Someone who had seem to be our friend turned against Mark and the vote in a very vocal way right before the vote was taken and I left the room in sobs.

I will never forget Mark coming over and sitting with me on our front porch after the failed vote and asking me what should we do? It wasn't that he was in crisis. It was that he could see it was bearing down on me so hard. So, my marriage-shaped ministry husband wanted to know if it was time for us to go. They can get another pastor, but you can't get another husband. I am your husband, first and foremost." The Lord gave grace and as you know we stayed.

How did I deal with the hurt from that incident and for many other incidents that have followed over all these years? Sometimes it is easy to harbor unforgiveness. Sometimes the thought of responding with First Corinthians 13 love to people who have hurt my husband or me seems almost impossible. It takes prayer and prayer and more prayer for God to change my heart and to keep loving these people. It also helped that I found a new lifeline that I hadn't really needed to depend on before and that was I found a pastor's wife in the area who I could regularly spend time with. I could share my hurts and concerns, she could pray and advise and console. I was so glad I had that friend.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

I would heartily encourage you to develop at least one friendship with a pastor's wife outside of your own who can be your ministry body. Ideally, don't wait for the crisis to build the friendship. Better that you know one another first. But whatever is the case, find a friendship like that. Not only for the crises times but also to be on ask you questions as someone else in the ministry who is trying to juggle similar tricky combination of nourishing the church and flourishing the family. And if you can find someone who's a little bit older than you and who's a pastor's wife, that might be best of all. They may have a little more water that's gone under the bridge that can give you perspective to help you where you are.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. What are some of the ministry heartaches you have experienced?
2. Have you struggled to continue to love the people related to your hurt? What has helped you to forgive?
3. Do you have a friend (especially another pastor's wife) who can be an outside lifeline to you as you endure difficulties and seek to love well? If not, can you think of someone who could be that friend for you? Does your husband have a pastor friend like this to support him during these hard times?
4. We know God works all things for the good to make us more like His Son, Jesus. How have you seen God use even these hurtful difficulties within your church to work for your good and to make you like Jesus?

CHANGE FROM SMALL TO LARGE

Churches in general and maybe the southern Baptist in particular love to see memberships rise. Bigger the better right? Maybe. But one thing I found as we went from small to large is that it meant less people who knew me and Mark and even our kids as the people, and more people who just knew us from the position that Mark held and our connection to him, as his family.

With less person association, came more assumptions and misunderstandings. We found that there were people who were tempted to want to be our friends (or our kids' friends) just so they can get some kind of "inner circle" inside scoop on the pastor's family.

Quirky things happen, especially when you live right next to the church like we do. Our house backs up to the church parking lot. We used to grill out a lot on Sundays, and we even had people just walking across the parking lot because they wanted to know what the Devers were having for lunch. We have a bay window that faces the parking lot if we found that people would be waving to us if we sat at the kitchen table and ate our lunch. (Now, we have a fenced-in back yard.)

At one time, a group of young women who call themselves "The Connie Spotters." They decided they would look for me in order to discuss I don't know a lot about me once they found me. (I am not a front pew sitting wife. I usually sit in the back of the balcony, as my bad back and chronic health problems allow.) There was even one woman who decided to leave the church because we weren't friends. I had never even met her. Not even once.

It's true. Not only do I not sit on the front pew. And, after the service. I don't stand at the door with my husband as he shakes hands as people leave. I would usually be having my own, private conversations with other members, helping with children's ministry, caring for our kids (when they were still at home), or scooting home to prepare lunch. To this day, I'm still not a back-door, shake-hands "first lady." Now, I also face many chronic health issues. There are Sundays when I am grateful to be at the services at all.

Many people say to me "Finally, I get to meet you." We joke sometimes that my new name is "Finally" because people say it so much. We joke, but sometimes I cry. It does hurt. I DO care. I DO speak to members, visitors, and kids. I'm just not in the highly-visible locations where most of our large congregation "learn" about me by sitting in the front center pew in the service or standing with my husband at a door after a service. And if someone DOES take offense that I'm not sitting where they think I should sit or standing at the back with my husband, I've been learning to see this as an opportunity to humbly let them get to know me and Mark a bit better. And, to express the idea that there are many different versions of good pastors' wives who follow their husbands lead and support him in ways best for him and his family. God has borne great fruit through these conversations.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

There are many more tales I could tell along these lines. Most of them are funny now, though they weren't at first. Most have come from innocent, honest questions and have only been unintentionally hurtful. But most leave me wondering (yet again) if I'm capable of being the pastor's wife I'm supposed to be.

The past 30 years at CHBC have given us lots of practice of knowing what to do when I'm having this identity crisis: I go to my husband. He reminds me of those Proverbs 31 bookends:
I am to fear the Lord (31:30) and I am to do my husband good, not harm, all his days (31:12).
And as long as he's happy with what I'm doing I don't need to worry about what those other people think. And, it's really helped me to realize most people might do stupid things or say stupid things but

they are usually not meaning to do or say mean things. And that means I have opportunity to humbly and graciously receive their words and maybe even opportunity to teach them that a pastor's wife is just that the wife of a pastor in my job like every other wife is to support her husband in the best ways for him and their family. And that is one of the best ways that I can serve the church, even more than knowing everyone's name. I would encourage you to remember these things and go to your husband for reassurance when the pastor's wife identity crises come knocking on your door, which they probably will from time to time.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. Do you feel expectations for what you are supposed to be as a pastor's wife?
2. Where do these expectations come from? Others? Your husband? Yourself?
3. Have you shared these expectations with your husband? How can he help you think through them?
4. Where do you find comfort when you feel like you are not meeting the expectations of others? How can you and your husband work together to help others understand what a pastor's wife in general is supposed to be, and what in particularly, is helpful to him, as his wife?
5. What does it look like for you to live out the Proverbs 31 bookends during your current season of life?
6. How does your faithful living out of these "bookends" look different from other pastors' wives you know?
7. Have you come up with any helpful responses to people who voice their inappropriate expectations that help correct their misunderstanding in a way that is clear but kind? Have you ever been able to make these opportunities teaching moments?

CHANGE FROM LOCAL CHURCH TO BROADER OPPORTUNITIES (1995 to present)

Over the years, Mark has been given more opportunities to speak to other pastors, accept evangelistic opportunities to speak to local college groups, lead classes of interns here at CHBC, host conferences like Together for the Gospel. All sorts of marvelous opportunities, rich with gospel potential. These are wonderful but they are also sometimes very hard for me. My husband, being a good marriage-shaped ministry man, hasn't wanted to overtax me by being away too much. We talk over each request and make the decisions together about what he should do. However, it is so hard for me to say "no" when it comes to these gospel opportunities. I feel like I am being a "gospel blocker" --getting in the way with God using my husband to share the gospel with others.

I felt this way so much that when we had been here about ten years, I started to have panic attacks and I didn't know why. I finally went to see a counselor and as a counselor ask more questions, it unearthed in anger that I didn't even know was there. Who the anger was against I wasn't even sure at first. But the more I prayed and thought, I realized in horror that it was against my husband, and it was due to how much he was way. And the sad thing was, he had been asking me about different gospel opportunities and whether he should do them, and I've been saying yes. So, it really wasn't even his fault!

Oh, that was quite a conversation that night when I shared with Mark what was going on. And frankly I asked his forgiveness. I had been keeping him from caring well for us by hiding the toll all these gospel opportunities were taking on us. But oh, the good that God has done to recycle that pain! We started having gatherings of our elders and pastors' wives which I shared some of these things with them so they would make the same mistake that I did. The group is still going on today and they are so encouraging for us as we talk together about all sorts of aspects of ministry life. They are a great lifeline for all of us.

It was not long after all this that an invitations committee was formed of guys on staff to vet the invitations Mark received and give feedback on whether he should consider them or not. Now, the final word still came from Mark and me. And while I still struggle with saying no to some really good opportunities, I am so much more confident that my husband truly wants to know the benefit costs of every gospel opportunity so that he can make a good decision that this is not nearly as hard as it used to be.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

I would strongly encourage you to realize that your family is not just a side affair from your husband's ministry. But it is actually part of your husband's ministry. Caring for you like we talked about before. Seeing that you flourish. Him being on hand to lead your family well. But realize that him making those decisions to care well for your family (and do "less" for the church) leads the church well. He is doing what every other godly husband needs to do for his family: he is thinking through opportunities and demands and trying to care well for the family. Your husband is being a great model for other husbands/fathers by making these decisions.

There's a very popular saying going around that a wife can half or double a man's ministry; and yes, it is true. But halving and doubling cuts across lines in a different way than you might think at first. It's not, the MORE the wife and children sacrifice, the MORE the husband's ministry multiplies. No! I would say, the biblical model is, when the husband is tending well to the needs of his family and making finite ministry choices to help them flourish, the more his ministry multiples: NOURISH the CHURCH, FURNISH godly leadership and a godly example, AND FLOURISH the family by caring well for them. This helps both lives and hearts be happy in the ministry. And that, too, helps multiply his ministry to the church.

So, be humble and honest! I'm not saying never sacrifice! I'm just saying don't withhold information that keeps your husband from making the best decision for your family. That's another piece of trusting God's

sovereignty and trusting your husband's wisdom.

And if your husband does accept any of these outside opportunities, scheme well how you can use that time when he's gone to make the impact less upon your family. Such as, have a single person or a married couple over or join up with another family with kids during the times when he's gone. Enlist help. That evening that might feel lonely because your husband is out doing something, half a lady over after the kids are down for the evening. I call "this twirling with the swirls." Not only does it make it less lonely but it's also super beneficial.

And, I would strongly encourage you to seek out other ministry wives, either in your church or across churches in your area to get together to share and pray. This group has been such an important lifeline for us all.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. Does your husband have extra opportunities outside of his regular "job description"? Is your husband's job description so broad that it seems to have its own set of extra opportunities?
2. How do you and your husband decide which ones to accept?
3. Have you ever over-committed? How do you deal with that to get through it? How do you learn from what happened to avoid that in the future?
4. What ways have you found to make the most of the times when your husband is away?
5. Does your husband have others he could use as a sounding board to decide what opportunities to take?
6. Is it hard for you to tell your husband that it's not a good time to accept a particular extra opportunity?

CHANGES IN ME

The last change that I want to talk about doesn't really have to do with changes in the church, but changes that happened in me that has greatly impacted the shape ministry has taken within our family. In 2013, I was diagnosed with cancer and then treated in 2014 and 2015.

Unfortunately, in the process of treating my cancer some permanent damage was done to my body which has made the old days of frequent hospitality close to nonexistent. There are many times when I can only make it through part of one service instead of being on hand through both services and greeting people afterwards etc. I usually target particular events to take part in, then I have to rest a lot afterwards.

This physical limitation was then compounded with another, eight years later. COVID-related issues hit me hard in 2021 and 2022. They left me with a permanent health issue that impacts most every area of my life, including being able to eat hardly anything without having bad reactions (for those who are interested in knowing is called MCAS--Mast Cell Activation Syndrome). So, not only do we not know how I'm going to be feeling in order to have somebody over, but I can't even taste the food that they're eating or that I'm serving. Good thing I've had so many years practice cooking in my husband is a very plain man in terms of his food!

Then, came January 2025. I developed an extremely rare, very debilitating autoimmune condition that first attacked my kidneys and then the nerves in my arms and legs leading to complete paralysis. I spent 100 days in the hospital over seven stays as they searched for the cause and tried to get control or find a cure for it. A team of church ladies took turns coming to the hospital or to our house to help feed me and even scratch my nose, when I was at my worst.

The elders of the church came round Mark and relieved him of some of his usual ministry obligations in order to have more time to be with me. My husband even cancelled going to the conference that he planned and was to lead celebrating 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea…. And he did this without ever telling me that HE was the one who planned it and was in charge of it! He made not even a peep of disappointment over not being able to go. He knew I would feel bad and he didn't want to add to my sorrows. And, most of all, he 100% firmly believed that for whatever reason, it must be God's sovereign will for him not to be at that conference. And perhaps not surprisingly, last year's difficulties lead to him discussing with others as well as me as to whether it was time for him to completely step down from ministry at beloved Capitol Hill Baptist in order to care for me.

But by the grace of God, the support of our church, and some very smart doctors, we made it through the year, I responded to a drug, which gives me four months relief at a time, instead of two weeks. Yes, I'm still in a wheelchair and using a walker. My hospital bed is in our living room and just a few days ago was the first time in almost a year that I was able to climb stairs. I can only walk for five minutes at a time. But I can do dishes, make dinner, and other household basics. With the help of able-legged friends, I've continued to hold kids' outreach events in our front yard and Children's Ministry workshops during the Pastor Weekenders we hold three times a year. It's not what life used to be, but together, we have found a new balance and a way to flourish our family while Mark continues to nourish the members of Capitol Hill Baptist as their pastor.

These changes have been devastating to me as I seen ways that I used to be and serve my husband basically be retired. Talk about feeling like I can't be a pastor's wife like I'm supposed to be! But you know my husband has been so good to continually encourage me with God sovereignty even in these health struggles that have impacted so much of what I can do. And I so appreciate.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

If you are a person who struggles with chronic health issues, my heart goes out to you. I know how hard the fatigue, and the pain, and the uncertainties of what the day will bring impact what you do. And it's easy to think or to only see the ways that those health issues are getting in the way with certain parts of your husband's ministry, especially hospitality.

But do you know, the sufferings that I have been through and still go through have shaped my husband. His sermons are sweeter, he longs for heaven more. There's more nuance in his wisdom, and you can't tell me that's not worth nothing. Our lives are the crockpot in which God cooks and tenderizes His pastors, our husbands. Our husbands teach their congregation through their preaching, but also through how they live. That's YOU and even your frailty that God has woven into His good plans for your husband as their pastor!

Yes, I have learned a few tricks on how to still be hospitable to people even given my limitations; but on the other hand, I have confidence from my husband and from God that even in these things God works for our good and His glory. And I know the same is true for you. So, keep praying that God would even fill your inabilities and your weaknesses with His good plans. I have seen the Lord use my weaknesses with all this illness cause me to lean more upon Him. And in that process, I've seen Him use my weaknesses to comfort and strengthen more people than ever have through my strengths. And I hope these thoughts bring you as much hope as they have brought me.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. Have you or someone in your family had a major change that has significantly altered the way you have been used to partnering in ministry with your husband? What heart struggles have you had in coming to grips with this change?

2. How have you and your husband communicated these changes with your congregation? How have you come to a new normal?
3. Any words of advice to others struggling with these kinds of major changes? Any ways you have already seen the Lord use these trials for good in your lives and in your church's life? Any way you have seen the Lord grow your husband and his ability to counsel and encourage others as a result of your trials?

MARK'S COLLAPSE

For years, I've been the one with health issues. Mark has been the strong man standing in the family, here to support me. But on Memorial Day, 2026, while I was enjoying my first trip with enough leg strength to drive myself to the grocery since March 2025, Mark suddenly collapsed while a walk with a friend. In the middle of a sentence, he just fell to the ground unconsious. His heart stopped beating, in the wake of a huge arrhythmia. If not for the great presence of mind of Mark's friend, and the unknown lady who rushed up and administered CPR, this would not only be the last chapter in this article, but the last chapter of Mark's ministry and life as we've known it.

It cost Mark three broken ribs, but the CPR was effective. The ambulance came and rushed Mark to the very same hospital where I had spent my 100 days in 2025. Mark made a miraculously fast recovery from ICU to regular room to rehab to home in just two weeks. If you were to see him now, you would never guess what happened to him. He's back to preaching; back to leading the pastoral internship; back to travelling.

But especially the first week, when his short-term memory loss was so profound, everything was up in the air. Emotionally, I was in shock and so thankful to still have my husband. But rationally, I was trying to think through all sorts of logistics. Would Mark live? Would his memory ever come back? Would he need memory care? Would Mark be able to continue as pastor? Did this single-income family just lose its only income, with us living in church housing, our insurance through the church, and me so handicapped for life? (Why, I don't think I could even be a greeter at Walmart in my current state!) And, why in the world didn't I think to get us long-term care insurance! Arrgh!

Then, there was simply trying to make sure Mark got the immediate care he needed. I had the needed medical and personal knowledge of Mark to work with the doctors and decide on plan of care that Mark couldn't provide. (Mark couldn't even remember why he was in the hospital for most of the first week, and certainly wasn't pleased to be there!). But with my very limited physical ability, how was I going to be there as much as he needed, even if just to tell him again what happened to him and to cooperate with the medical personnel! Talk about a gap between what I could do and what was needed!

But once more, the gap that seemed impossibly big for me, was no problem for God. Nope. God always takes care of His people. And the deficits we face, He makes into a glory gap, showing how great He is to the encouragement of His people and a beacon to the gospel. Mark received care from some of the very same team as I had. "Oh, yes! You are the ones with the church," quite a few said. As Mark improved, he took the opportunity to speak to some about the gospel. As news spread outside of the hospital, people around the world began praying for Mark. Mark's friends and the elders here at CHBC made daily visits to Mark and to me. They quickly calmed my fears about having to move out of the house soon, if Mark died. They promised to help me, however, needed. They shuffled Mark's responsibilities; they comforted the church; stayed with Mark so I could rest; they gave me rides to the hospital; and, they prayed and prayed.

With my illness in 2025, I could see how beautiful a healthy church was as they supported us. But that

was just the bud compared with the fully-flowered, bursting-with-perfume rose we experienced in the weeks after Memorial Day, 2026. And not only was this healthy church beautiful because of how it cared for us, but it was beautiful because of how the church, itself, coped. If Mark never stepped foot as pastor into CHBC again, the church would do just fine. Yes, they would miss him, but they wouldn't miss out. This was not a one-man's empire ministry, but an every-member discipling church with a plurality of elders to keep on shepherding this local church well. Praise the Lord for that!

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Martin Luther once said that theology wasn't dry, heady stuff, but what life is made of. I suppose some might think that the business of building healthy churches is dry, heady stuff, too. But let me tell you, it's the stuff that beautiful churches are made of! So, encourage your husband as he patiently works to make your church healthier. Stand next to him as he withstands grumblers who don't see the point in church membership, being careful with baptism, the need for a plurality of elders, and other sometimes turbulent topics. Cheer him on, and pray him along! It is worth it, for the church, for your family, and to the glory of God.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. How can you pray and encourage your husband as he seeks to build a healthy church that can keep on thriving, even when he's gone?
2. Who can you thank for supporting you through your family's difficult times?
3. Can you think of a time when you have seen God fill the gap of your needs with His provision? How did that bring Him glory? Take time to thank Him!

FINAL THOUGHTS

Forty-four years of marriage and ministry mean there is a lot more that I could say, but I think it's time to close. If you have ever visit CHBC and you like what you see, remember that it did not start out like this. This is a 32-year work and it's still in process! So, if you are in a situation that is difficult, or if one day your husband takes a pastorate and it's in a difficult situation, make sure you don't freeze the frame right where you are. Continue to be faithful. continue to pray.

The way my husband says it is: "Preach, pray, love, and stay." I would have never imagined that all the things that have happened here, would have happened, given what CHBC was like when we first came. This was a church that almost shut its door, but decided to give my young husband a try, instead. All these wonderful things happened at CHBC, not because my husband is some Superman, but because they were God's plans! The Devers are just grateful that we got to be a part of them, and a part of these wonderful people these 30+ years.

"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Titus 1 and the Conversion of Pastors' Kids

Does flourish the family mean converted kids?

Titus 1:6 is a thorny, little verse that creates a lot of angst among some pastors and churches because it seems to be saying that only if a man's children are Christians can he qualify to be a pastor.
Here is how some of the most used translations word this qualification:
ESV: "his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination."
CSB: "his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination."
NIV: "a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient."
KJV: "having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly."

What does this passage mean? It sounds like it's saying that our kids must be known to be converted in order for our husbands to qualify or stay qualified to be pastors? And if it doesn't mean that, then what does it mean?

First of all, it's helpful to remember that what we read in English is a translation from something originally written in Greek. And the Greek word being translated believers in the ESV, CSB, and NIV is also translated "faithful, as the King James version chooses.

Is a man disqualified from the ministry if his children remain unconverted?

The answer to this question must be "no." First of all, we know that conversion is is something that the Holy Spirit brings about. Why would a man be disqualified for something he has no power to bring about in his children? Many scholars clear up the issue by pointing out that the word translated "believers" can also mean "faithful." And that fits far more with the rest of the description of elders' kids: "not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination." Faithful in this context does not mean full of faith in Christ. It means faithful to live under the authority of their father.

My husband, many commentaries, and many other pastors feel that faithful is a better choice.
Here's why:
1. Because the context seems to be using that word as the first of three descriptors of children's obedient, responsive behavior under their father's leadership. It's not that the first one has to do with their spiritual state before God. It's that all three has to do with their pattern of compliance to their father's leadership.

2. Nowhere else in Scripture is there a reference to a pastor's or elders' children having to be Christians for them to qualify. In 1 Timothy 3:4, the mirror passage for elder qualifications, a man is said to need to : "manage his own family well and see that his children obey him." Paul wrote both of these letters. I don't think he (or the Holy Spirit who inspired his words) changed his mind in the time between when he wrote Timothy and Titus. I think he's conveying the same thing with two different phrases.

3. We cannot convert our kids. We can raise them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We can love them. We can lead them without exasperating them. We can pray for them. We can discipline them. And these are all things that, when done consistently, lead to the very pattern of behavior that Paul says describes the children of men who manage their homes well.

4. We must leave the conversion of our children to the Lord. That is a work only He can do.

5. Think about it logically. A man who is married without children meets the qualifications of an elder. He serves as a pastor until his wife has a baby. Should this man's step down from being an elder or pastor until his child is of age to be saved and shows signs of salvation? And even if that child does come of age and then his father qualifies again to be a pastor, what happens if they have a second child? Do they once more retire from the pastor until that child grows up old enough to be saved and show signs of conversion? It just doesn't make sense, does it? And if that's what Paul really meant, wouldn't he have elaborated on it? It makes a lot more sense that Paul is just using a different turn of phrase and Titus 1:6 to say the same thing about a husband managing his family well in 1 Timothy 3: 4.

Is a man disqualified from ministry if his children are rebellious?

I think it's important to distinguish between strong-willed and allowed to live in rebellion. Strong-willed kids test the bounds of good behavior a lot! In this sense, you could say they rebel a lot. Does that automatically mean that a pastor who has a strong-willed child shouldn't be a pastor? No, it cannot. The point of this passage is whether the father allows his children to live out a pattern of rebellion without correction. He needs to help them turn away from their self-willfulness to live under his authority. The highlight is on the father's responses to his children's behavior, not whether they are naturally compliant or not. This points back to the idea in 1 Timothy 3:5 about an elder needing to manage his household well.

The bottom line is: we are called to live out what it means to be children of the living God before our children. We are to teach them about Him in ways that leaves a legacy in their hearts for use by the Lord whenever, however He and His good plans see fit. We are to pray for the Lord to save them, but we are also to pray that we might glorify the Lord in how we raise and teach our children, regardless of whether they are ever saved. This is caring well for our children, and this is a powerful model for the rest of the families in the church trying to do the same for their children.

Underneath all this teaching and praying for our kids, we need to pray for ourselves and our husbands. It is a monumental task to faithfully live the kind of life God calls us to live. God is holy and perfect. We, His children, are not! How are we to ever reflect Him to THEM, being the weak, sinful people that we are! And on top of being examples and teachers to our kids, we have the eyes of the congregation upon us, too!

I think the key words to remember are "faithful and grace; humble and prayerful." We will never be perfect, but we can every day ask God to give us His grace to be faithful. In humility before God, our kids and our congregation, pray to God for Him to work in us and in our children as only He, by His Holy Spirit can. God has ordained to work through our prayers, so down on our knees we must go, for our husbands, ourselves, and our children. May He glorify Himself, help us, and save them!

Helping Your Husband Care Well for Your Kids

You Are Your Husband's "Sous Chef"

A sous chef is the chef's most important helper. A sous chef understands the chef's recipes and cooking style. He (or in this case, she) is the one who manages the execution of them. Caring well for the children is one of your husband's most important jobs. That makes it one of the most important areas within the boundaries God has given you. Your husband and you will come together to make good decisions to flourish your family, but usually, you are the one at home with the kids a higher percentage of the time. In many ways, you're the one who will make the decisions come to fruition. That makes you a sous chef of the home and of incalculable value.

Let's take a look at what God calls our husbands to do for our kids and think about how we, as their wives, help them care well for their families in this way.

How You Help Your Husband Manage Your Family Well

Our husbands are called to be the leaders of our homes. And they need to do this well, not just for the sake of their families, but the sake of their position as pastor. Managing their household well is one of the hallmarks of a man called to pastor a church. As 1 Timothy 3:4 says: "He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)" Love. Lead. Protect. Provide. That's what it means for our husbands to care well for their families.

Love

Togetherness as husband and wife, involves our hearts, our minds, and our bodies. The same is true of togetherness as a family. We want to love our children in such a way as to reach their hearts, to instruct their minds, and to spend time with them, making cherished memories as well as setting an example for what it means to love God and live for him. This means taking time to understand each child and how to best feed their souls. It is teaching God's truth to them and displaying it to them through how we care for them. Here are some aspects to loving our kids that we learned in part by wisdom and in part by messing up.

Fish and Birds

"A fish and a bird may love each other, but where would they live?" One of my favorite quotes from the movie Ever After. We have some fish and bird elements to the relationships in our family. There are times when I understand our son or daughter and my husband doesn't seem to get them at all. There are other times when he understands our son or daughter and I don't seem to get them at all. This is when humility and the willingness to learn from each other can help us better love our kids.

Sometimes it's hard to admit when there's a disconnect. But if were willing to listen to each other, we can build a stronger family. Here's an example: I am really good at thinking up basic life questions to help me get to know somebody else. My husband freely admits that he is not. He likes to go heavy, deep, and real, real fast. No wonder he is so much better at having fuller conversations about the gospel that I am! But together we make a great pair! I'm the one at the dinner table that can think of ten preliminary questions that draw one of our children out about their day and he's great at adding deeper elements to the conversation. He's learned from me the importance of those first questions and how he needs to practice them. I've learned from him to not just start the conversation but to go even deeper. Together, our children feel understood and loved.

Treasure Planning over Spontaneity, With Kids

Spontaneity is a wonderful thing. Everybody loves something special just out of the blue. I still remember when my mom wrapped this up in blankets and we jumped into the car in our pajamas to drive around and look at Christmas lights when it was way past our bedtime. Or when I brought the kids home from school to find out Mark got opening night tickets for episode one of Star Wars at this swanky theater on the other side of town… And it was a school night! Fun memories; but not enough on their own. Far more important were the regular dinner times together, and the regular times reading the stories at night before bed, and other very regular things that Mark and I did with the kids because he guarded that dinner through bedtime part of the schedule carefully.

Most pastors juggle such a full schedule that depending upon spontaneity often leads to unintentional neglect. Enjoy spontaneity; but do not rely upon it. Planning will help you more consistently have enriching time as a whole family or with each of your kids individually.

Start with your husband's schedule and figure out where his freest times are. Take a look at your kids' schedule and when they have special events or are especially free. This is where you can play coordinator and bring the two together. And by planning these things and putting them on your schedule, it can help your husband not to plan something else ministry related right on top of it. If it's possible, plan regular date nights for your husband and the kids individually. Again, this doesn't have to be going out for a three-course meal. It can even be as simple as going to the hardware store and grabbing ice cream on the way home. The point most of all is the time alone together.

This becomes increasingly important as your kids get older. Perhaps you fear that your kids may leave the church or hate God as fallout from being a pastor's kid. This might happen. But, if you can plan in regular family time and alone time with dad or with mom (but especially with dad) and be seeking to know your child's heart and mind and life in a caring way, this can help protect them from a lot of the things that you fear. And even if they do go through a season of rebellion, you gave them years of caring love that will help to draw them back later. Trust me. I speak from wisdom on this one.

Being Present

One of the things we learned as we went on was that I usually was the one in the best spot to coordinate more intentional times as a family. Since I was typically the one who knew everyone's schedules, I can help Mark make a workable plan for spending time with individual children or all together as a family. He might be the initiator still, but I was frequently the coordinator.

Another issue we face was navigating sermon writing over Fridays and Saturdays – – right when our school – age children had more of their free time and extracurricular activities. As much as Mark would've preferred not to be this way, he's always done his sermon prep on Fridays and Saturdays. The trouble with that is it has always been hard for him to pull away from his work, both mind and schedule – wise on those days. But it was important to do so. God gave our kids to parents, but he has made it clear that it's not always enough that I be the parent representative present at that important soccer game or horse show. They wanted their dad to be watching them from the sidelines and cheering them on.

Don't forget: parents are not fully interchangeable. Dads and moms both have a special role in their children's lives. This would be one of the biggest ways we messed up in our parenting years. If we exasperated our children in our parenting anywhere, perhaps it would be here. We have certainly asked our children for forgiveness for not wising up sooner in our parenting and missing some wonderful times all together. Praise God for forgiving children who have now grown up to be adults themselves and see better that his actions weren't coming from a lack of love or full understanding of the impact his absence had upon them for some of those events!

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 feel like you see unhealthy patterns of neglect that he does not see or that are still continuing, despite your best efforts. Pray for God to give you and your children gracious, forgiving hearts when he doesn't get it right. Pray that God use for the good even those things that your husband may never get right. God certainly has been kind enough to answer these prayers in our family. I'm sure he will in years, too.

This is one reason to consider home schooling. Your family does have more flexibility to spend time together during the week other than the day before the Sunday sermon with this kind of schooling option.

Lead

Nothing like the word "lead" comes to mind when you're talking about your husband at ruling his household well. Before God, it is your husband, more than anyone else, who is for making wise decisions for your family and seeing that they are carried out. But though your husband is most certainly the God – ordained leader over your household, you are absolutely crucial in helping him be a wise leader and helping your family live under his wise leading. Here are some ways you do that.

You Inform His Leadership

I have yet to meet a husband who needs no help from his wife in learning how to lead his family well. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Everyone has a family background in which some things were done well and some things were done not so well. Everyone has people they naturally understand better, and others, they can't seem to make any sense of it all.

Our husbands are no different from everyone else. They need us and our strengths to help shore up their weaknesses. They us with our family background to bring in a different perspective on family time. They need us with our ability to connect with different people from them to help them understand any of their children who they don't naturally connect with. And perhaps most of all, they need us because often we are around our children many more hours than they are. So, while our husbands most definitely are the leaders of our families, we are most definitely indispensable informers that God uses to help our husbands be better leaders.

Many times, Mark's response to our children's behavior, especially misbehavior, has been modified by me helping him understand something about them that was clear to me and wasn't so obvious to him. We both desire not to exasperate our children, but it is taken both of us to navigate children's personalities to arrive at the best way to discipline in the all too frequent gray areas of circumstance.

Also, as it turned out, both of our children had learning disabilities. I spent hours reading books about learning disabilities, helping them as they struggled through homework, and meeting with their teachers trying to understand each of their special needs. Mark needed his leadership to be informed by what I learned. He changed what he did based on what I taught him.

Carrying out His Good Leadership

Our household has been a fairly stereotypical one, with Mark at work most days, and me at home with the kids most days. That put me in the role of chief carrier out of his leadership with the kids. I can recall many times when the kids misbehaved or wanted to do something that we all knew exactly how their father would react. They would give me those puppy dog eyes and plead with me, "Oh, come on. Daddy's not here. If you don't tell them he'll never know… That we let the dog come upstairs or up on the living room couch." And even more seriously rebellious against his desires: "Don't make us go to Bible study tonight. It's so boring. Daddy is out of town. He won't know," in hopes that I would choose not to carry out what Mark would want them to do if. But so much more was at stake than whatever was the issue at hand. I was deciding whether there would be mutiny in the ranks or not, and whether I would honor my husband even at times when he never needed to know otherwise.

These are very hard, but very powerful opportunities to uphold respect for our husband's leadership. And even more, they show upholding respect for God's choice of our husbands as the leaders of our home. Pray for grace to not give in! Don't miss out on the great gift these times can be to your children. How you handle carrying out your husband's leadership when he's not actually at home can help raise esteem for him in your children's eyes or lower it. And a lot of it comes down to your attitude. It amazed me how our kids could seem to sniff out even the slightest discrepancy between a rule that Mark put in place and my personal feelings about that rule. If they felt my personal feelings leaned in the direction of what they wanted as opposed to what Mark said up as best, they would press in even harder, hoping to get me go along with what they wanted. I found it was so important for me to show trust in Mark's judgment even if it was different from my own personal preference. It was a great model for what we were asking the kids to do under his leadership.

Hardest of all, was when the children would ask for a decision about something that I was unsure what Mark would counsel. I tend to be the more lenient of the two of us. Sometimes the situation was such that I went ahead and made a decision before consulting Mark. Many times, this was ok. But more than once, I accidentally put Mark in the "bad guy" position, who in the end said "no" to something I had already said "yes" to. Ugh! Over the years, I realized two things: there would be situations in which I would have to make these decisions. I would never get them all right, but I would be faithful to try and faithful to pray. And, if at all possible, I would postpone a decision, telling the kids, "That sounds like an amazing opportunity. I'm not sure. But when your father comes home, will talk about it and let you know." This was not only good for the kids, but it was good for our marriage. I was showing the kids that I respected Mark's leadership and was encouraging them to respect it, too. And, was modelling a good marriage that would hopefully be something they would emulate as they grew up and got married, themselves.

A very particular way pastors' wives carry out their husband's leadership is on Sundays, at church. Most families come to church with father as well as mother joining the children in the pew during worship service. But if you're the wife of the pastor, and he's preaching, then it's just you with those kids. Parenting in the pew can be difficult for any family, especially those blessed with wiggly little kids. It gets even more difficult if you feel that the eyes of other members are watching you and potentially even scoring your ability to train your children in good churchmanship etiquette. It may be classic to sit down front with your kids if you're the pastor's family. But seek out your husband's leadership on this. If yours is a family that will do better worshiping the Lord or training your children without the easy observation of others, give up that front row for a less conspicuous spot. And if anybody asks why you moved, be honest. It gives you an opportunity to explain that you care most of all that your family can worship the Lord well and that you want to sit wherever you can make the most of your children's time in church for their spiritual well-being.

Helping Fathers Lead When They Are at Home

Let's face it. The ministry can leave our husbands exhausted at the end of the day. Passive just sounds so good! I think we need to be sensitive to how tired they are at the end of the day. But I think we need to help them help us and connect with the kids when they get home even if they'd rather check out. Usually, it works best to try to do both. Figure out a way for them to have a few minutes to unwind. Figure out a time for them to engage if they need help doing that on a regular basis. And don't depend upon your husband having the same eyes as you for where and when you need help. If he needs you to spell it out to help him care well for his family, then spell it out.

Here's an example from our lives back when our kids were little when Mark literally started doing that: When our kids were little and my husband was working on his PhD in his little study upstairs, 5 o'clock would roll around and I would have kids underfoot while trying to make dinner and having a tough time of it all. For while I would get upset with him for not noticing what time it was; or, noticing what time it was and not thinking about coming down and helping me with the kids so I could get dinner finished. It didn't seem to matter how many times we talked about it, the issue just kept occurring. So what did my husband do? He added one phrase to his daily schedule on his computer: 5 PM "Ask Connie what I can do to help." That may seem very unromantic but let me tell you: it has been a wonderful gesture of love for years and years now that he still keeps up even though the kids have flown the nest.

Perhaps you do just great getting dinner on the table while managing the kids, but you are dying on the vine come bedtime. You're happy for your husband to come home and charges batteries for a while, so that when it's bedtime, he is able to take the lead. You're going to need to make your own set of cue cards. Take time to sit down together and talk about what's most helpful for your whole family.

Other times, your husband's great at pitching in with meeting the kids' needs, but there's other areas where it's harder for him to lead. It's great for you to step in when he's not there. That's you helping fulfill his leadership, even when he's not home. But when he's home, leave room for him to lead. This does not have to entail nagging, but it may require a conversation if there is a regular area where he's failing to see the need for his leadership that you see. If this is the case, do this winsomely. Encourage him by telling him what a blessing his leadership is in your family both for you and the kids. Let him know how much you want to help him be that leader and humbly point out the situations you have in mind where you would love to see him expand his leadership. And later, when you see him striving to lead in those new ways, don't forget to show your appreciation. Your encouragement will only help him grow and become an even better leader within your family.

Protect

This is the job every Christian father has, not just pastors. But here are some special types of protect that can be especially important for pastors to think about with their children.

1. Protect Them from False Conversion

Your children's conversion: sign of a pastor's job at home well done? Unfortunately, some people think so. It's is a litmus test for how well he's doing his job, they think. It's easy to forget that your children's conversion is of the Lord, not of the perfection of your spiritual training. Sometimes it feels like we failed our quality control rating as the pastor's family if our kids don't become Christians. Or, even if they do show signs of trusting in Christ, the temptation can be to baptize them early as a sign to the church that their pastor and family must be doing Christian parenting right because their kids are Christians. Do not buy into this lie!

If someone subtly tries to take issue with your spiritual rearing of your kids (for no good reason), use it as

an opportunity to remind them that salvation is of the Lord. Listen humbly to them. Take away any good advice they might offer. Encourage them to pray for your kids. But confess your trust in the Lord, the one who alone brings dead souls to life!

And if the problem isn't whether others think your kids are saved, but are wondering why your kids are baptized, use it as an opportunity to remind them that you are waiting for the children to get older and bear the good fruit of salvation that backs up their profession of faith. It's not a fun way to give guidance to someone else in your church, over the seeming reputation of your family spiritual life, but it's a very powerful one. Don't give in to pressure for your kids to look a certain way and inadvertently making them into hypocrites and blurring what true gospel centered living looks like.

2. Protect Them from (Some) Others at Church

Our kids had some very good friends and positive role models here at our church. But they also faced some very hurtful ridicule and judgment from others at our church. "Oh, you're the pastor's kid we can't invite you to do…" "You're the pastor's kid, you should know the answer to all the Bible questions," are examples of the ridiculous sort of comments that peers made. "What are you going to do with your life since you are Mark Dever's son/daughter," jabbed many others. Then there was the time during his school's Spirit Week when our son Nathan thought he used temporary pink hair dye on his hair… but it turned out to be permanent. Someone noticed his bright pink hair at church and chided us for letting our son live clearly in rebellion. Did they ask why Nathan's hair was pink? No. They just assumed. (And even if it had been pink on purpose, that wouldn't even mean, necessarily, that Nathan did it out of rebellion.)

I'm not saying these are the worst comments ever, certainly not persecution, or anything like that. And I know that many kids just let these comments roll right off of them. They certainly can be a great opportunity to empathize with our kids and point them to caring about what God thinks more than others think. I would still say that it's important to remember that some kids are more sensitive than others. More sensitive kids will need more protecting and more encouraging, especially if the comments are more than just the one-off wisecrack.

Probably even harder than comments like these, were the opinions that our kids should be involved in this or that activity to encourage other kids to be a part of that activity or to show the pastor's endorsement on certain activities. "If your son/daughter doesn't come to youth group, why do we think anybody else is kids will come to youth group? If you want the youth group to grow, your daughter needs to come," was the pressure some well-meaning volunteers would put upon us when she didn't want to take part in youth group. We stood behind our daughter's desire to not attend because it was the kids in youth group who were the very ones giving her such a hard time. Youth group was not necessary for our daughter to learn about God. The volunteers would have to encourage youth group attendance off of something more than our daughter's seal of approval.

How do you protect your kids from the comments? Many times, you can't. Sometimes we would talk to teachers or parents of kids. Often, we would just talk to our kids. And if there was a pattern of teasing that showed obvious signs of hurting one of our children, we would not put pressure on them to go to that activity. They could just stay with us. But it is a balancing act between helping them not care so much about what others think and exposing them to more than they can handle. It takes so much wisdom and not a little trial and error.

Protect where you can, but sometimes the better way is reminding them that the people who say these things and do these things are sinners and fools just like they are. They can spend every hour of the day

pointing out to the hurtful things someone else did but remind them that God can point to their hearts and do the exact same thing. You can't always make the circle of life small enough to keep her away, but you can help your kids expand their hearts to love even those who hurt them.

You can also dilute the hurt by surrounding them with other people from the church who love them well without these foolish actions and comments. Usually, there's far more kind and encouraging people than there are critics in a church. Lots of interaction with this kind of people can help give your children give them a more realistic and favorable opinion of the people at church. It doesn't take away the sting of the hurts, but it makes them much easier to overlook.

3. Protect Them from T.M.I (too much information)
Derogatory comments or vengeful actions of church members can be hard enough for us to receive, process, and forgive. For kids, it's so much harder. Not only do they frequently not yet have the developmental maturity to process these actions or comments well, but they often don't have the spiritual maturity to understand that godly people are sinners, too. Add to that, while you may have an opportunity to reconcile your differences and restore unity with these church members, often there's no platform for the kids to come to a resolution with these members who have mistreated their father or mother.

As much as possible, when you share church difficulties with each other, do it out of the earshot of your kids. And if they do overhear you or even observe this behavior going on, don't dismiss it. Make sure they know when reconciliation has occurred. And if you see a bitterness of spirit toward someone you have reconciled with, you may need to ask for that person to join you in sharing with your child how God has restored your friendship. This can turn a potentially harmful consequence into a potentially God glorifying testimony about how God helps his people to live.

4. Protect Them from a Home Over-run with Ministry
Hospitality is a hallmark of pastors. This doesn't have to include inviting others into your home, but it usually does. There is nothing like welcoming someone into your home for getting to know them and them getting to know you. However, do not let your home be overrun with ministry. Keep track of your kids' response to hospitality. We found that there were seasons in our family's life when our kids were happy for us to have lots of people in-- both strangers or couples/singles who became like family to us. Then, there were other seasons where our kids wanted our home to be our home. Or at least if we had people over, they were more of the adopted family type.

Let your in-home hospitality reflect that first and foremost your home is a place of hospitality for your family. You will only have your kids at home for so long. You know God has called you to love them and spiritually nurture them. Don't throw this away as less important than having adult visitors or members over.

This doesn't mean you don't ever have strangers over, even in seasons when the kids are looking more for alone, just close friends/family time. It does mean that you think carefully about how often they come over. Or you can always take someone out to dinner and get a sitter for your kids. And remember, someone might at first be offended by you not having them over to dinner, but you can use it as an opportunity to teach them about the importance of being hospitable to your children at home, first of all. This can be a very powerful and useful teaching opportunity as well as good protection for your kids within the home.

Another way to continue to be hospitable yet protect your kids is by inviting people over to your house after your kids are in bed. You can still enjoy great conversation over dessert and coffee. And if you have little kids, chances are your conversation will be far less interrupted this way. This is especially good idea if you have difficult issues to discuss. You protect your kids since of home and at the same time, you protect them from being partner to information that is better they don't process.

If you live next to the church like we do, protecting our kids from being overrun by ministry occurs as soon as church lets out. Because our very little back garden opened onto the church parking lot, people would just naturally come over and even come in our house, since the door is usually open. We have even had people come in unannounced and walk all the way up to the top floor of our house where our bedrooms are… That's three flights up. And that's pretty in your face.

If we decided to grill out, we have people walk over and say "Just wanted to find out what Mark Dever was having for lunch." I didn't really care if somebody knew if we were having hamburgers instead of sirloin steak, but it felt far more like the paparazzi at our back door looking for some juicy, news-worthy tidbit, than a social call.

Then there was the night when we realized that if people were over the second for the church they could look right into our kitchen and see whatever we were up to. One evening, I was dancing with my granddaughter, and somebody who was watching us from over the church building texted and said, "Nice moves you've got there!"

This woman was actually a good friend of mine and we laughed about it. But it did remind me how very public even the inside of our house could be to people at church. We've learned the value of the fence around our little backyard, of closing the window blinds and locking the door when we want to ensure a bit more privacy. This let our family have a greater sense that our home is our home and even we, the pastor's family, do well to protect are together time in our privacy.

When Is Enough Enough?

In an earlier section we thought about our husband - pastors sometimes needing to care for us by pulling out of a ministry (or the ministry) because it was more than we could handle. Sometimes father-pastors need to protect their children by doing this, too. And sometimes father – pastors need to protect the church by stepping down to a different job in which they could better manage their family.

Here are some questions that could help you and your husband consider:

1. Are there ministry pressures that your kids regularly feel as too much? (especially the pressure of expectations at church, difficulties with friends, or difficult ministry situations your kids know about and are trying to cope with or are watching you try to cope with).

2. Is the ministry schedule regularly causing your husband to be absent in their lives, and despite many attempts at changes, it consistently stays that way?

3. Is your child in a regular pattern of rebelliousness that consistently needs more time than ministry can provide? Does the rebelliousness seem to be made worse by the fact that your husband is in the ministry?

4. Do you feel like you are truly unable to manage the kids God is giving you in your current ministry situation? Would there be a different ministry situation that would be a better fit for your family? Or does it seem like the ministry in general is not a good fit for you managing your children well?

Provide

Provide Them with Spiritual Leadership (Even Though You Can't Provide Them with Conversion)

Another very important area of our husband's leadership in our families is in nurturing their spiritual growth. Most Christian parents start praying for the conversion of their children even while they're still in the womb. Oh, how we want them to know the Lord and be saved from their sins! By the age of two, Bible board books and prayers have become part of the bedtime ritual. By three, we are wondering if we should start a catechism with them. What can we do to bring our children to the Lord? If we can just figure that out, will do it. Just give us a list. We will carry it out.

But the conversion of our kids is not a cake recipe either. We can't make just the right mix and out pops a new creation. Spiritual birth is of the Lord. He calls us to be good stewards. Here are four fundamentals of good spiritual leadership of our children from Psalm 66:

1. Live joyful lives.
"Shout for joy to God, all the earth." Psalm 66:1, ESV
We can live joyful lives in light of what God has done. True joy is a gift of the Spirit. It is remarkable. It cannot be reproduced by any other religion. It reflects the Spirit of God working within us, giving life where there was death. It is living in faith, despite trials and despite having to let go of what the world holds to be true and dear. And so, as we parent, we ask God to make our joy in Him evident. It is a very potent witness of the truth and power of the gospel to our children as they watch us.

2. Live to glorify God in all things...regardless of the outcome!
"Sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise! Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds! ... All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name." Psalm 66:2,3,4, ESV

We live to glorify God in all that we do. We do not have control over the conversion of our children. Their conversion is a work of God's Holy Spirit that we pray for and yearn for, but we cannot use it as the measure of success. On the other hand, seeking to glorify God in how we teach, raise and live among the children is a "success" we can strive for. This is freeing! We can strive to please God as we declare the greatness of His name to these children. We can strive to please God as we do, to the best of our ability, all He calls us to do, including raising these children. It makes parenting yet another venue for glorifying God, regardless of who is converted. And, it makes conversion a matter of trust in God…just where it should be.

3. Teach the children God's awesome works, as revealed in the Bible.
"Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man."
Psalm 66:5, ESV

From before the creation of the world, God has had one, big plan to redeem His people as a magnificent display of His glory. We read of it in the Bible—the record of "His awesome works on man's behalf." And so, the Bible is our primary "textbook" for teaching our children about God, and for how we parent. The Bible is central to all we do and long to teach the children.

4. Tell the children the gospel that has saved us and can save them.
"Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept our soul among the living and has not let our feet slip... Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul. I cried to him with my mouth, and high praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished iniquity in my

heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!" Psalm 66:8-9,16-20, ESV

As Christians, God has given us grace to hear and believe the gospel. We have repented of our sins and trusted in Him as our Savior. We have the testimony of His good work in our lives…and so, as we parent, we want to testify to our children of God's work in our own lives. This is not a God only of history and past acts. This is the living God who is at work today…and in us! What a story we have to tell our children every day, of the God whose mercies to us are new every morning! Let your life and your care for them be a fruitful soil for a good taste of the gospel. Godly; available. Humble, when wrong. Dependent upon the Lord to be your wisdom, your strength, your guide for shepherding your kids.

Do Not Exasperate

The funny thing about those fundamentals is that they are all lacking a prescriptive list of none of techniques every godly parent should use with their child. Carrying them out will look different from family to family. I feel like this is part of what Paul is getting at in Ephesians 6:1 – 4 says: "Fathers, do not exasperate/provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the training/discipline and instructions of the Lord."

This verse is about fathers (with the help of their wives) shepherding their kids in ways that nurture them and help them to flourish. They seek for the discipline of their children to reflect the Lord treatment of His children: with both holiness and loving compassion. Full of grace and mercy. Willing to give them what's best for them, even if it's not what's easiest. And, by trying to be consistent and fair in their discipline, they hope to not provoke them to anger.

Perhaps it's easier for pastors and their wives to exasperate their children than other families when it comes to discipline, at least at church. Why? Because you are aware of other people looking at your children's behavior and are concerned that they will think any misbehavior as a reflection of you or your husband's inability to raise your children in a godly manner. Oh, how hungry our hearts are for people to think our children somehow bypassed the Fall!

It's so important to realize managing your household well is a different standard than producing perfect children. It certainly would silence critical times and turn away judging eyes, but it can be a heavy burden that you put on your kids to act perfectly, especially at church. While it can be very hard, one of the best things you can do when someone wrongly misjudges training of your children is to humbly receive their comments but also remind them that your children are no different from anyone else's children: they are sinners in need of a Savior. By God's grace, you spend your life teaching them God's truth and pointing them to that Savior, by living out and teaching them God's truth, by loving them and disciplining them, and by praying for them. It's the Holy Spirit's job to convert.

It's never fun when someone unfairly judges you but try to see these comments as a chance to talk about what good and godly parenting is. You never know what their background is. You may feel like a loser by their comments, but remember that it really may be far more an indicator that they are a learner when it comes to families. And if their remarks rattle your confidence in how your husband or raising your children, go back to your husband and talk it through.

But Paul isn't only telling fathers to not provoke their children to anger in the way they discipline them. He's also telling them not to provoke them in how they instruct them about the Lord. I'm afraid we learned this the hard way. Those poor firstborn children!

In our case, it was our daughter. We were two eager parents hoping to fill our little daughter with lots of Bible truth not quite before she could eat solids though we would've even done at that early if we thought it would have been possible. We pulled out our shiny little copy of the children's catechism and basically forced it down our poor little active, bouncy little girl's throat. Yes, she learned the answers. But for reasons we didn't find out until later, it was only with great difficulty. It turned out she had ADHD and her difficulty focusing and holding still long enough to spit out all the correct words in the right order put quite a strain on her. Ugh!

She's a completely grown-up adult now and will laugh about it with us, but she said she still gets the panicky feeling if she thinks about that catechism. She knows we didn't know she had ADHD at the time. She knows we weren't trying to exasperate her. We were trying to give her a library of God's truth. I'm grateful for her understanding of our good intentions. But there's something to be said for looking at what your kids are like in using the way they are as more effective conduits for the truth you want to place in their minds for the Lord to hopefully use in their hearts.

THINK BOTH END AND MEANS! Our daughter loves music. If we had used music to help her learn those Bible truths, I think she could've learned them so much more easily and without us exasperating her. I'm not saying that you don't ever do things that are difficult for your children. But I am encouraging you to understand your children and remember the point is getting the truth into them, using a particular format you like.

I would also be careful to not always be using a Bible verse is a proof text for your children's discipline issues. Yes of course, you want them to know you're not coming up with these ideas yourself. But there's a number of popular authors who encourage you to quote at appropriate Bible verse each time you discipline them. Or, quote the whole gospel to them every time you discipline them. Not only is this impractical many times, but it can accidentally feel like hitting them over the head with a Bible rather than softening their hearts to God's good news for sinners.

It is great to be deliberate in teaching Bible truths to your children through your family devotion times, through their Bible classes, and the preaching of God's word at church. But the gospel is more than just "God – Man – Christ – Response" four word summary you might teach them. The same is true of the Bible stories they hear you read and the Bible verses you help them memorize.

I would encourage you to think of the gospel, the truths of the Bible, and seeking to know God as water your family swims in. It comes out in your tone to your spouse to your kids. It shines out in your reaction when you get bad news or mistreated. It is reflected in how you care for your kids, and how you discipline them. And in your humility when you ask your kids or your spouse to forgive when you've sinned against them. Gospel-centered parents are teaching their children Bible truths in so many ways, every day. Pray that God's Holy Spirit would give them spiritual eyes to see and hearts to believe.

I love Deuteronomy 11:18 – 21: "Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; Titus symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you live down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be as many in the land that the Lord swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth."

Deliberate; continuous; making the most of opportunities your life story; flexible. This is how God is calling His people to teach their children each day. There's nothing like life to be a powerful display of the living God and of your living faith in Him. Sometimes, we reflect God's character… hopefully a lot of time. But other times, we need to confess our sinfulness. We can always thank God for sending Jesus to be that Savior we need, and we can ask Him to provide for us and work in us all of His good will. That's what a faithful parent be a display of to their children.

There is so much we can learn from others as they parent their kids. I've found it especially helpful to talk to other pastors and their wives about navigating raising PK's. But also remember, that there will always be customizing going on as you learn from others and apply their wisdom to your family. It's going to take your knowledge of your kids to know best how to reach them.

Children are our very own, home-grown mission field. It starts in our hearts and our heads, and by the grace of God, and a lot of prayer, we take a lifetime to present it to our kids in their language, so that it can reach their heads and with the work of the Holy Spirit into their hearts. We cannot convert our children, but we can display the faithful witness to the one, true God. We cannot make our children have spiritual eyes, but we can glorify God… to please him.

Back to That Sous Chef Position

Do you see how much of good spiritual stewardship is a day-to-day, event-by-event task? This is why you are so important as your husband's helper with the kids. HE may be God's gift to your family to bless them by loving, leading, protecting and providing for your children. But often it is YOU who carry out so much of his good leadership with the kids each day. It is YOU who can help inform his leadership by what you observe and by helping the kids and him connect with good time together. And know that by doing these things, God is using you to help your husband to flourish your family and continue to be qualified to be a pastor.

Further Reading

- The Pastor's Kid Barnabas Piper
- How to Help Your Anxious Teen: Surprising Sources of Their Worries and Fears
- Jessica Thompson
- Parenting with Love and Logic (Children, Teens) 2 volumes
- Parenting with Loving Correction: Practical Help for Raising Young Kids Sam Crabtree
- Prayers of a Parent series by Kathleen Nielsen
- I Need to Trust in God, Hope in God, Love Others, Love God (4 book series) Joel Beeke

42 Ways to Do Your Husband Good in the Ministry

There's one earthly helper who our husbands are given by God who is the closest and far more influential and more pervasive helper than any of the other helpers our husbands will ever have. So much so, that a whole section is dedicated just to this one person. Any guesses who? This person is YOU! As we see in Proverbs 31, a godly wife fears the Lord and longs to do her husband good all her days. Her life is linked to his and she is thinking about how to bless him in all that the Lord calls him to do, both in the home and at work. As pastors' wives, doing good to our husbands includes using our lives to support them in the ministry.

What makes you so important to your husband equipping and caring for God's people in your local church? Because not only are you his helper that helps get him in the church doors and into the pulpit, but you are the one who God has chosen as his life partner. You, unlike anyone else, will be there to share the joys and the pains of ministry and cheer him on. And as you go through life together, God will be teaching your husband how to care better for others, how to bring the hope of God's truth to tragedies, how to find wisdom for difficult decisions, how to find grace to forgive and strength to carry on with each other through God's grace.

And God will use you, together with him, to be a humble model of what it means for a man and woman to seek God and serve Him all the days of their lives in a godly way. And God will use all of these things that he's learned in the training ground of your family to love and care for others. I hope this section will be like a time lapse video of the blessings you can bring (and probably already do bring) to your husband's life but you might have been so busy living it, that you failed to see just how very instrumental God has made you in your husband's calling to love and equip the local church of believers.

1. By asking how you can help him

Learn to ask what would be helpful when a situation arises. You may think you know, and maybe you do. But I've been surprised how many times, how my husband really needed help is different from what I thought he needed. Not only does it help me in that moment to realize he can give me some information that will help me to do a better job of helping him, but it grows my understanding of him as our experience through the situation grows time after time after time. This makes me a better support to him and helps him do a better job of caring for God's people and for our family at the same time.

2. By encouraging him

I've found encouraging my husband to be one of the most important ways I help him persevere in the ministry. There are few people as close to him as I am. I'm his best friend and I see him in ways in situations nobody else sees him. And even when a situation seems one way on the surface, I've gotten pretty good over the years to understand what's going on inside.

Some great times to encourage your husband:

- As he tries to lead your family and the church well
- When members are wrongly critical of him
- When he has yet another friend move away and is sad
- and really, just about any other good thing you see him doing or attempting to do.

That's right. ATTEMPTING to do. Don't wait to encourage your husband until he's got something 100% right! Encouragement is great at any point in the process.

Just think about a piano teacher with a new student. Do they wait and encourage that new student with

ust think about a piano teacher with a new student. Do they wait and encourage that new student with the new student sounds like they could be a concert pianist? No! They encourage with the attempts where that student is this day even if it's just playing Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star. So with your husband, you can almost always find a way to encourage him if you take that sort of you to what he's doing. I guess it's another version of gratitude only coming across verbally.

And I'm not talking about false praise (I guess flattery would be the word). I'm talking about true encouragement. My husband says over and over again that one of the best things I can do is encourage him with the ways that I see the Lord using him.

Don't let encouragement be that gift some other wife has but it's not your gift. Encouragement is the gift we all need to have. And if you feel like you are short on encouragement, ask God to help you and start writing things down during the day to help yourself to see more of the things you could or you could encourage your husband about. At one point, the group of pastors' wives here at CHBC actually took calendars and wrote down something on every day that they appreciated about their husbands, then gave them the calendars at the end of the year. The husbands were so encouraged. But you don't have to wait till end of year you could do it at the end of the month but just do it for 12 months or whatever. It's just an idea. Make it your own!

3. By praying for his ministry
"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account." –Hebrews 13:17

Did you know that God will call our husbands to account for how they have shepherded the members of their local church? Whoa! Being a pastor is a big deal.

From 1 Timothy, we know that they are called to the huge task of:
- **Nourishing** the church so that it might be transformed into the likeness of Christ.
- **Furnishing** an example for God's people.
- And **Flourishing** his family while he's doing all this.

This is a task far bigger than they can do! But it's not bigger than God can do. Our husbands need our prayers daily! God can give them what they need to do what He is calling them to do, but He loves to be asked. And who better than us to ask Him, as ones who know our husbands so well?

4. By being a friend
We help our husbands persevere in the ministry simply being their friend -- someone who enjoys and appreciates them. Someone to understand them. Especially in times of hard and church and they feel misunderstood or even had appreciated, being a friend to that A listening ear and a compassionate heart is so helpful to them.

5. By being his wife and tending to your relationship with one another
They sound like a no brainer but it's amazing how life gets busy and we tend to assume our relationship with each other. I'd like to say there's places where we visit in places where we live. In other words, we might do things for a short period of time, but if we do them as a pattern over the long haul, it's going to cause serious Issues.

Coasting in our relationship as husband and wife is one of these. Whether it's coasting in having times of intimacy in the bedroom or letting go of another date night for something more urgent that comes

up, or just giving up on a struggle that you or your husband has in your marriage that you're just tired of working on.

Another incipient problem to watch for is the tendency to become divergent in your lives. In other words, he does his stuff and you do yours. You live together, but your lives have become separate in many ways, including your hearts. Busy ministry life often leads to a divide-and-conquer diversity, but keep coming back together in your affections and in your schedule.

6. By being someone through whom he learns about shepherding women well
You are one of the best people he can learn from about women. You are not him. You are one of the best people he can regularly learn from about how to deal with people other than himself. You are someone who's there for him in the long haul, so if he's got lessons to learn that take a lot of practice, you can be that person that he can learn from over and again.

7. By growing in giving and receiving correction well: humility
There will be times when we need to change and we don't see it ourselves. And there will be times when our husbands need to change and they will not see it themselves. We can help each other by winsomely giving and taking correction. And in doing so, we help each other grow in receiving correction from church members. Pray for a growth in humility that our husband's and our own desire to better serve God outweighs the sting of correction.

Abigail, in 1 Samuel 25, is a great example of a woman who was used by God as a restraining grace on one occasion in David's life. She very humbly but winsomely pointed out reasons why he would later regret taking revenge upon her foolish husband, Nabal, for his insults. David heard her advice and praised God for using her to steer him away from the heat of the moment:

"David said to Abigail, "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. Otherwise, as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak." (1 Samuel 25:32-34)

While we thankfully may never be in the position of preventing our husbands from murdering each other, there will nonetheless be times when the LORD may very well use our words to avert other problems our husbands tackle as pastors.

8. By growing in godliness, ourselves
We need God to equip us and feed us from His Word just like our husbands do, if we are to be who God wants us to be and able to serve who God wants us to serve. We can help our husbands love God's people through having regular quiet times and growing in our relationship with the Lord. This makes us better able to care for all the people God wants us to care for, our families our husbands are friends maybe coworkers, as well as grow to be a better model to God's people, and to be better prepared to respond to them in love and in truth and serve them at church.

9. By helping our husbands grow in godliness by sharing how God is growing us
It will only be by God's power and grace that our husbands persevere in equipping and loving God's people as God wants him to. Helping him grow closer to God will equip him to love us better and serve the church better.

One way we encourage their growth is by sharing about ours. We can sharing the way God is growing us in our lives, through His Word or something from a devotional book we're reading.

10. By his caring for you in your sufferings
Your husband is learning along with you as you go through life. And in this "school" of caring well for you through times of suffer, he learns how to care and comfort God's people in your church.

It gives him more compassion it gives him more wisdom. And it flows out into how he treats the Saints, and how he views God's Word and God, and into his servants and how he presents things, and how he longs for heaven. There has been very little like our partnership in suffering that has tenderized my husband's heart in amazing ways. God wastes nothing!

11. By being interested in what he's learning, or what he did in his ministry day
Asking him to share about what he did or what he's learning not only encourages him that you care, but joins you two together in ministry. And you never know how your perspective on what he's learning or did may bring fresh insights that help him to care better for the members of your church.

12. By enabling his friendships with other men
Your husband's friendship with other men can refresh him and build him up. Whether it's simply enjoying something together or sharing struggles and asking for prayer, these relationships provide a great partnership with you in building up your husband. On top of this, I've found that while there are many things my husband will hear me say and humbly accepts, there are some things that it's easier to hear from another guy. Yet another reason to help him have time for friends.

13. By not hiding his pattern of sin but helping him get help
We all struggle with sin and temptation, including even the most godly man. Ideally, the basic pattern with these struggles is repenting and fighting against sin, not allowing it to be the ruling pattern of your life.

As those closest to our husbands, there may be times when we see a sin struggle that others don't see. Hopefully, our husbands will confess their struggle and get help. But if for some reason that doesn't happen, we should love our husbands and protect their ability to be a pastor by helping them get the help they need. Or, protect the members of our church, if their sin struggle disqualifies them from being a pastor and needs to be addressed by the elders.

What a terrible position for a wife to be in! And if you find yourself in this position, certainly pray and ask God to show you how. But also ask God to give you strength to do what is not just the lighting in the seats but it's also loving your husband and caring for his soul more than you care for him being in a particular calling.

14. By submitting to their leadership in the home
We help our husbands by living under their leadership and trying the best of our ability to carry it out, when they aren't there. This is especially true as you nurture and discipline the kids, as he would want you to. Don't forget what an important helper you are as you do this! You might feel like you had a worthless day by collecting your little toddler from pulling books out of a bookshelf that you've told him to stop doing and corrected him on a million times already. It may feel like a very small task. But the truth is, by you going back and helping him learn to turn from that behavior (yet again), that's a part of you carrying through with disciplining your child in a way that not only will make their life flourish but also fulfills your husband's leadership in the home in a way that shows he manages his family well, as 1 Timothy 3 says that they should.

15. By helping them make a good connection with the kids

This has been such an important way I've helped Mark. Sometimes it has been filling him in on events in the kids' day to rejoice in, to correct, or to provide other leadership. Other times, it is helping him coordinate schedules to make sure he's on hand for an important up-coming event, or to take a child out on a "date night." These connections help keep the kids and your husband close and inform his wise leadership in the home.

16. By keeping them in the basics

I guess you could say Mark and I have a pretty 1950s Leave-It-to-Beaver style family situation. I'm the one who takes care of the basics of life for the family, such as the laundry and cooking. He's the one who makes the money to provide for all these needs. To any extent that you helped make those basics of life happen, you help get him ready to be standing in that pulpit or over at that church encouraging and equipping God's people.

Doing the laundry and the cooking puts him in the pulpit with clean clothes and a full belly. Don't underestimate these seemingly mundane tasks! The Lord even uses them to help our pastor/husbands.

17. By facilitating hospitality

Hospitality is where church meets pastor and family at home. Sometimes, we have people over but my husband gets take-out food. But usually, hospitality involves me doing a lot of the prep to welcome people into the home, both with food and any extra cleaning. Yet another way we help our husbands in the ministry by providing a warm atmosphere to others.

But prep is just the beginning of how we help our husbands through hospitality. As we spend time with our guests, they get to see another side of the pastor's family. And unlike an office visit, it's not just Mark interacting with people, but both of us. That lends a very different feel and provides for very different conversation. So helpful for our guests and so helpful for my husband who wants to know them better so he can pastor them better.

18. By beckoning him away from ministry

It is a big burden to care for all the people in your church! It's something that occupies your husband's mind and his heart and so many hours of his day. If your husband is like mine, he spends hours every day NOT listening to members' happiest stories and words of encouragement, but usually their deepest struggles and even complaints. They love their sheep, but many times, they come home TIRED! A smiling face, a nice-smelling meal, a listening ear, a willingness to give him a few extra alone minutes to go for a run or otherwise collect him before helping with the family is a huge gift to him. And, by refreshing your husband at the end of THIS day, you help make it possible for him to have what he needs to goback for another one tomorrow.

Part of beckoning away from work, though, will be scheming about his schedule. If every slot is filled on his calendar, it's hard to find time to be refreshed. Or, if he regularly uses his day-off for ministry overflow in ways that are taxing. I find I help my husband by being a schedule sleuth and helping him coordinate evening ministry obligations and our family needs in ways that also help protect time for him to be refreshed.

Some men even need help taking a break from work when they are on vacation. Some pastors' wives have told me that their husbands actually get a burner phone on vacation instead of their regular phone. They only give out the number to essential family, friends, and a staff person who can contact them in case of emergency.

19. By keeping margins and making him a priority in your schedule

Be a schedule sleuth with you/your family's schedule, too! Try to have regular time when you are all available. This can be a tough one for families with school age kids when everyone gets busy with homework and after-school activities. And, it can be a problem if we regularly use our husbands' home time as tag-team time rather than family time. Or, when you go so hard during the day that you are too exhausted to hang out with him. When you build margin into your schedule, you build space for your family to flourish.

20. By sending him out early before you, letting him stay after you at church on Sundays

It may not look like much on the clock, but when you send your husband out early on Sundays to greet people or get settled before he preaches, it is a huge help to him in the ministry. Sunday mornings are crunch time for many families, so losing your husband right when you are trying to get everyone out the door can be so hard. But what a difference it can make for him!

The same is true for the after-worship-service time. You and the kids (and maybe even Sunday dinner guests) head on home to leave him time for more conversations with church members or visitors. Again, he may only be 30 minutes behind you, but these after-church times can be a lot to juggle on your own. Yet, we've found it can be some of Mark's richest conversation times. And YOU helped make that happen with your sacrifice!

21. By "helping" him with his sermons

Don't worry. I'm not talking about writing sermons for him. But when he asks for your insight on his passage, you can bring a whole different perspective to what he says or how he says it. You can also help him with his sermon simply by making his preaching passage a regular part of your devotions during the week leading up to his preaching. You can be praying it for yourself, the congregation, and for him. Not only will the Lord be faithful in answering your prayers, but you encourage your husband that you are thinking about what he's preaching.

22. By sitting alone in the pew… with kids!

We help our husbands in pastoring by being willing to sit in the pew alone as they lead the worship service. This is especially true when our kids are little and it feels much more like World War II than a worship service. But if you were not willing to sit there and wrestle with your kids and train them and how to be in a worship service on your own, your husband couldn't be upfront bringing God's Word and encouraging all God's people.

23. By simply being a church member committed to everyone else in your church just like everyone else

Your regular commitment as an involved church member may not sound like anything special, but it is! First of all, simply because you are contributing to the life of the church. But also, because you are another set of hands, ears, and mouth, who knows your husband well and can help encourage the members in ways that help him love them. We've found my de-briefing conversations with him about different members' situations has led to better care of them. This is especially true of conversations with women, who my husband would not know as well, since at our church, pastors typically avoid regular, on-going counselling with women on their own.

24. We can help them as we use the special influence we have as pastors' wives for the good of the congregation.

Though we are no more important than any other member of the church, nonetheless many times the things we say and how we say them, as pastors' wives, have a greater influence upon others in the

church. This is a great privilege that must be seen for what it is and carefully protected with prayer and God's Word.

I often don't think of myself as anyone of special importance. I'm just plain ole Connie from Colorado. I forget that others might see my words or actions as more significant just because I am the pastor's wife. I have learned that while I want to be on guard against considering myself as something special, I want to make the most of opportunities to use the influence I do have to encourage others. So, I try to pray before going over to church and speaking to people, that God's Holy Spirit would give me words that glorify Him and encourage those I am speaking with. I try to think about what I've learned in my quiet times and be ready, if appropriate to share truths I've learned. I try to make be careful to speak of my weaknesses and of God's strength that has empowered me to accomplish whatever He has allowed me to do.

25. By being a woman

This may sound funny, but we can help our husbands by simply being a woman! There is an old book called Men are from Mars, Women Are from Venus and the premise was that there's some basic differences in men and women and how they think through things. And while that might not 100% be the case, I've certainly seen it be true enough.

By me being a woman, I can help my husband understand the women members in our church. We've had many a conversation about how to re-word conversations or re-work actions to be more helpful to women he's pastoring.

26. By being a translator or transmitter

Springboarding off of the last point, I find that God often uses my as a translator or transmitter for my husband, especially with the women and children in our church. I'm just going to call a spade, a spade: there are times when husband is understood better by the men. Partly, because he is a guy. And partly, because guys are who he is in discipling relationships with, giving him more time for deeper conversations. As a woman, I'm the one in our family who can have those deeper, more regular conversations with other women, and frequently that spills over to their kids, too.

Sometimes they bring their questions or their concerns to me about something they've heard or they think they've heard. Sometimes, I encourage them to talk to Mark or another elder. But many times, it's simply a matter of clarifying something they misunderstood. God uses these conversations to build unity and often fosters a greater understand and sense of love between those women and kids and my husband and the elders.

27. By helping him find balance in caring for God's people and for your family

There are always more needs to be meet in the family and at church than any pastor can meet! Balance has been one of the most consistent difficulties the Devers have faced in ministry. We help our husbands care well for church and for their families as we speak honestly and plan carefully about the needs of his family. This lets him make better decisions that shape his ministry what's and when's, in order to tend well to his family.

28. By realizing that a great man isn't a perfect man

Elizabeth Elliott used to tell women to look for an 80/20 man in a husband. That meaning, you might LIKE to have a husband who gets things 100% right, but the truth is, 80% right is about as good as it gets. (And guess what: the same is true for YOU!)

We are all learners our whole life. And even when we understand we should do something, that doesn't mean we are yet great at doing it. You help your husband by appreciating the good things he does at church and in your family, and encouraging him in areas that he struggles in and is trying to improve. And, by being gracious, remembering that while he may not be a 100% perfect pastor/man, he's probably an 80/20. Someone who's 100% great but if you can get someone who's 80% great and 20% you got yourself a good man.

29. By helping them provide counsel to others

Our husbands learn so much from living life with us, and in turn, this helps them as they counsel others. Where does a man grow in being a godly husband and father? You guessed it: through his own family! Where will he learn more about women and how to counsel them or their husbands for their good? Same answer: his own family. Where will he feel life's heartaches so he can comfort others better? Once again, the family. The family is one of the best training grounds a man has for being a pastor.

30. By expecting him to be a sinner

Like everyone else we know, our husbands are sinners. We help them by understanding that they have sin struggles; by forgiving them when they sin against us and by praying for them/ encouraging them to repent and fight sin.

31. By not expecting him not to be a mind reader

Sometimes we think that because our husbands know us so well that they should automatically know how we feel or what we need. After 40+ years of marriage, Mark has gotten quite good at that. What a gift! But when we EXPECT that our husbands "should have known better" without clear communication is unfair and discouraging. Help your husband care well for you and your family (and others in your church), through clear communication rather than mind-reading.

32. By expecting him to be a learner

For all that we might be good at already, there's also something that's new to us that we're learning. If we expect someone to be in the learning process, we are usually gentler and more patient with them. Help your husband by remembering that he is always a learner. Find ways to encourage them by pointing out what they are doing well or doing better. This not only helps them, but it makes us more graciously absorb their fumbles.

33. By being careful with our words to him

Men can counsel each other by joking and cutting each other down, but women should not do that whether it's their husbands or other men. Men see women's jabs differently than men's Jack. It's their love language, but it's not our love language to them. Men need our encouragement.

34. By being slow to disregard our husband's counsel

Be slow to disregard your husband's counsel. I am not saying your husband get it all right. My husband doesn't; (and, neither do I). But I DO know that God has woven his leadership decisions into our lives.
Be easy for him to lead. Appreciate him and who God has made him to be. And remember: even if you disagree with his counsel, and even if it turns out not to be the best counsel, there is usually nothing but the best intentions in it.

But don't be a silent partner, either. He will lead better with your humble, winsome input. Pray for him and encourage him. Ask God to provide him with godly advisers. Chances are, someone has already gone through what decision he's thinking about for your family.

As a pastor, your husband is to care well for his family and they are to follow his lead. You help him by submitting to his leadership and helping the children do so, also. And P.S., I've yet to see the Lord fail to redeem even what turned out to be not the best decision that Mark made for our family! The God who leads behind your leader IS perfect and oh, so kind to us!

35. By being understanding when they need flexibility in their schedules

Expect for pastoral needs to break in unexpectedly into even your best laid plan. You can help your husband by being gracious when these emergencies arise. Plan well but hold those plans loosely!
He might need an extra 15 minutes for a pastoral phone call during usual family time or having to cancel a long-anticipated date night. The ministry is a calling filled with interruptions. If we expect these interruptions to come and see them as God's plans that we didn't know about rather than disruptions of how life should have been, it can help us to re-coop a good attitude more quickly.

Chances are, our husbands are as disappointed as we are with the change of plans. We help ourselves and them by seeing these occurrences from the standpoint of God's sovereignty rather than thoughtlessness or lack of care on the part of our husbands or church members. (That being said, when the disruptions become a pattern that regularly trumps plans that are important to the life of our family, then you need to have a serious conversation together about it. There may be changes that can be made to help avoid this.)

36. Remember that your husband means well, even if he doesn't do well

9.9 times out of 10, even when my husband does something stupid or says something stupid to me or someone else, it's not out of malice, it's out of oops. Similar to the idea that everyone is always a learner about something is the idea that everyone is good at some things and not so good at others. Expect yourself and your husband not to be good at some things that are even quite important to you, your family and the church. Instead of chiding him, help him scheme how to avoid some of the "oops" that is bound to come.

When our kids were small, my husband would get so busy working that he would frequently forget to ask how he could help me as I tried to get dinner ready and still keep our active kids alive. We finally learned to have him write in on his schedule: "Ask Connie how I can help" at 5 pm each day (when possible). This was wonderful! I received the help I needed, and he received the prompt he needed to give it. Our kids are long grown, but do you know, he still pops in around 5 and asks if there's any help I need. Go schedules! This very simple "fix" helped my husband help me and flourish our family in a little way that has had a big impact.

37. By cultivating an attitude of gratitude

An attitude of gratitude right there next to disappointment and flexibility is the need for gratitude.
Oh, how we love to make our plans. And they're usually such good plans and so well thought out. But many times, our plans don't materialize as we hoped due to ministry needs.
Perhaps our husband was delayed for the date we had planned because of a crisis. I find that looking for things I can be grateful for, it helps me not be so disappointed at what didn't happen. I can be grateful that my husband wanted to make plans with me. I can be grateful that chances are they'll be a better time where we can get together. I can be grateful that I want to be with my husband. I can be grateful that he's skilled enough to help that couple.

Don't get me wrong: I'm not saying don't be sad that you missed the date. I'm not saying don't work on changing a regular pattern of crises that cause you to keep cancelling dates. But I am saying to try to see the good and to be thankful for it with what you have to do. There's an old saying that says, If life gives

you lemons, make lemonade." With our God who is so good and so big, and our husbands who love us and desire to care for us as well, there's so much to be grateful for! And they are so helped by our cheerful attitude!

38. By being happy that he is a pastor who loves God's people
Being a pastor is not an easy job. It can be hard on your husband, hard on you, and hard on the kids. Your husband can be trying his best and actually be doing quite well, but there is still someone complaining about something. And that's just the beginning of what makes the pastoral ministry so hard!
Which is why you help your husband so much when you continue to voice your love for God's people and a love for your husband being a pastor. Pray that God will give you this kind of love for His people! It helps your husband persevere through even the hardest ministry days.

39. By expecting him to be distracted
There are certain times when my husband comes in the door and he looks like he is all there, but his brain is somewhere else. Whether it's the sermon he is in the middle of, the hard conversation he just had with someone, the members' meeting coming in a few hours, or something else, Mark is not yet engaging with me or the family. This used to frustrate me a lot, especially because the times when he is distracted are usually times when he is very busy and we have only a little window of time to enjoy him before he's back to work.

But as I noticed that his distraction came at predictable times, I learned to expect it, plan for it, and be kind to him. Sometimes, it's just giving him an extra 30 minutes between office and home time to unwind. Other times, it is simply not planning anything before certain distracting events. The way my husband is built, Saturday nights before he preaches are NOT good times to have someone over for dinner or to go out on a date. His mind will not be there. Instead, our best night out is Monday night, after he's enjoyed a day off. He is much fresher and ready to engage.

Be a detective of your own husband and figure out his distracted times. Work together to both care for family needs and be sensitive to his distractibility. This helps you and him delight in the saints by not holding against them the fact that they are the source of your husband's distraction.

40. By looking to God to provide all things, even more than you look to your husband… in your family.
God intends to use your husband to provide many things for you, but remember that God is your ultimate provider. You and your husband can go together to Him for what you need. There are many times when we can only find in God what we should never expect to find in our husbands.

Reflecting on this also helps me to rightly rely first on the Lord, rather than on my husband. I know my husband is not Superman, if for no other reason than I don't think he has ever owned any spandex, and certainly not in red and blue with a matching cape! But sometimes, my expectations of what he can do for me/our family, look like I think he is "faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, and "able of leaping tall buildings in a single bound."

On my list of expected superhuman feats for my husband have been things like: converting our children, never making mistakes; making everyone in the congregation happy; be in all places at all time; write sermons without hours of study; protect me from all hurtful remarks or actions of others; fill all of the needs and wants of my heart; or at very least, reading my mind. A healthy admiration of our husband's abilities is one thing, but superhuman expectations are another! They are sinners like us! They need God's grace to do all that God requires them to do. They are God's good gift to the church. They are God's

good gift to us and our children. But they are not a replacement for God!

I have found that taking time to remember God's truth satisfies my heart upon God rather than trying to squeeze God-sized comfort from my human-sized husband. It also helps me look to God as the one who works salvation and sanctification in His church by His Holy Spirit and His Word, rather than on the works of my husband. This puts me in a position of contentment in God that allows me to love, encourage and be grateful for my husband, rather than find him lacking most of the time.

It is so helpful to your husband to know that your confidence is in the Lord, even more than in him. And, it can remind you that what your husband needs to provide for your family will be done in the strength of the Lord gives him. It encourages him that you see him as God's good gift to you, but not your Savior. This helps your expectations of him bearable so he can continue to pastor the church and care well for you. There will always be ways he and you both can do a better job to make a better marriage-shaped ministry fit. But your hope is in the Lord, not just in each other's innate ability.

41. Look to your God to provide all things, even more than you look to your husband… in your church

There are many times when we may be tempted to push our husbands to fix this church situation or to do more with that troubled member. We may be impatient for changes in our church and expect our husbands to be the ones to change it and change it now.

While we certainly want to encourage our husbands to say or do the difficult things that need to be done in love, we need to be careful that we are not really pushing for them to rush imprudently into change because we are impatient with God's timing. Like David, we need to be praying about these situations, both for God to work out changes in His perfect timing and by whatever means He chooses—using our husbands or not, as the case may be.

Most pastors deal with feelings of impatience to see certain situations or people would change. Sometimes this may tempt them to say or do things rashly in an attempt to affect a change now! Sometimes God may make this attitude a bit clearer to us than it is to them. God very well may desire to use a gentle, winsome, humble word from us to help them to turn away from acting rashly and to turn back and depend upon God and His timing. Carolyn Mahaney's talk called "Watch Your Man," available online is a great resource for learning how to do this.

Our husbands and we are far from the only ones facing the temptation to hurry along a particular outcome to a long-standing problem. There will likely be many times when we will need offer the same kind of gentle, humble winsome reminder to others in our church. We can pray with them for change in the situation but point them back to trusting God's timing and leading in changing the situation.

42. By saying when enough is enough

Sometimes there comes a time when ministry is not a good fit no matter how hard you try. The family is just not flourishing while the church is being nourished. Or, you see your husband so weighed down with the burdens of ministry that you aren't sure he should go on.

This may not seem like helping your husband in the ministry, but it is. Why? Because in the end, he wants the right person to pastor your church. And he wants to fulfill God's call to care well for his family. You help him by humbly sharing your concerns with him, so he can lead your family in making a good decision, even if it means he winds up stepping down from the ministry.

The Summary and the Springboard for More

The Proverbs 31 "bookends" are a great summary of what God calls every godly wife to be: a woman who "longs to do her husband good, not harm (v.11), and who 'fears the Lord." (v.30). These 42 ways I've just shared with you are applications of these bookends for pastors' wives. But really, they are just a springboard of what you may come up with to do good to your pastor/husband.

In Genesis 2, God says the "two shall be one." May what I've shared help you see why on that day when your husband will receive his reward from the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4), that reward will have your name on it, too!

Selections from the Series, Gently Take My Hand and Lead Me

Gently Take My Hand and Lead Me

Gently take my hand and lead me down the path of life,
Build for me a home with Jesus as its chief delight.
Let godly conversation fill the rooms from day to night.
Gently take my hand and lead me,
This you've done for me, your wife.

Gently take my soul and lead me down the path of life,
Always point me to the Savior, be my godly guide,
Teach me to trust more fully, be my couns'lor, true and wise,
Gently take my soul and lead me,
This you've done for me, your wife.

Gently take my heart and lead me down the path of life.
Choose to love, protect and nurture, persevere for life.
Grow in patience and compassion, full forgiveness when we fight.
Gently take my heart and lead me,
This you've done for me, your wife.

Gently take my frame and lead me down the path of life.
Cheer and serve me in my sickness, pray for all my frights.
Hold me close through all my sorrows, let my needs help shape your life.
Gently take my frame and lead me,
This you've done for me, your wife.

Like the Savior, you have led me, by His Word and by His grace,
Shown me Jesus, led me to Him, through your hands, your heart, your faith.
Gently take my hand and lead me,
I will follow, I'm your wife.

On June 5, 2022, Mark and I reached forty years of marriage and ministry together. "Four" with a "zero" behind it seemed worthy of a big celebration with friends. My preparation for the party took me a-visiting many memories as I picked out pictures to display. And amongst those I found treasures buried by the years: cards that my husband wrote to me at different points in our lives. As I re-read these cards, I was struck by how faithful my husband has been to lead me all these years, and that the words and music to the above song formed. It wasn't a song about perfection in marriage or ministry. But it was is a song of faithfulness—of Mark's faithfulness to me, and of God's faithfulness to us both, through dark and difficult days as well as those bright with happiness and promise.

In light of this, these talks flow out my life with my loving, gentle leader, and are written for you, fellow ministry wives. I hope that you will glean wisdom from lessons we have learned, both the "easy" and "hard" way. And most of all, I hope you will be encouraged that the same God who has been so faithful to us is the same God who can be counted on to be faithful to you.

Psalm 16
A miktam of David.

1 Keep me safe, my God,
for in you I take refuge.

2 I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord;
apart from you I have no good thing."

3 As for the saints who are in the land,
they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight.

4 Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more.
I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods
or take up their names on my lips.

5 LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup;
you make my lot secure.

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

7 I will praise the LORD, who counsels me;
even at night my heart instructs me.

8 I keep my eyes always on the LORD.
With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

9 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;
my body also will rest secure,
10 because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,
nor will you let your faithful one see decay.

11 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.

Introduction

The inscription for Psalm 16 says it is a "miktam" of David. No one really knows what that means. Its spelling is very similar to the Babylonian word for the lid to a pot. Others say it refers to an unknown technical poetic or musical term having to do with how the words of the psalm were structured or the tune was played. Over the past 30+ years as a pastor's wife I found Psalm 16 to be both of these in a way. It has been like a "lid" of God's truth that has nicely fit over our very full pot of pastoral stew.

Lid to Our Pastoral Stewpot

Now if you ever made a stew, you know that it starts out with tough meat and crunchy vegetables, a little water, and a lot of seasoning. The pot is put on the stove to simmer and gradually the water starts to boil. Without the lid, the water would boil way in the ingredients would burn and ruin. but with it, the contents tenderize and blend into something delicious.

There may not be tough meat or crunchy vegetables in pastoral stew, but there certainly are hard hearts and difficult circumstances in pastor, pastor's wife and God's people. Yet God uses the heat of our lives together to tenderize our hearts and to blend us into his church; and through that process, not only do we taste and see that the Lord is good, but he creates in us a picture of Him that, by His grace, others can taste and see that He is good too.

God has frequently used the truths of Psalm 16 as the lid on our pastoral stew pot. They have provided a surprisingly full description of who God is, how we should live, and His promises to help us live that way. they have worked with the heat of life to soften my heart, to infuse thoughts of who I am and how I should live with the seasonings of God and His Word, and have kept us blending together as husband and wife and as pastor and church family rather than burning up.

Structure to These Talks

Psalm 16 hasn't only been a lid. It has also become the structure I've used over the years to encourage other pastors' wives and their lives in their own pastoral stew pot. it will be the structure I use for these talks, too. And like David's miktam, I hope this book will help you to taste and see the Lord is good and is up to good in all he is calling you and your husband to. He is faithful and He will do it!

From Section 1: Living in Christ in a Life of Notice

"Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge.." Psalm 16:1

Keep Me Safe, O Lord: Fears of the Ministry

"Help wanted: Pastor's Wife. Must sing, play piano, lead youth groups, Raise seraphic children, entertain church notables, minister to other wives, have ability to recite Bible backwards and choreograph Christmas pageant. Must keep pastor sated, peaceful and out of trouble. Difficult colleagues, demanding customers, erratic hours. Pay: $0." -- Time Magazine March 29, 2007

"Keep me safe, O LORD." These are the first words in this song, Psalm 16, that David wrote. They have also been a part of the tune of my life as a pastors' wife. David's composition was likely inspired by fear in the midst of his enemies' death threats. Fear made its way into my melody from the very beginning, when Mark was being considered "in view of a call" to be the senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church. Yes, I was excited. Hopeful. Prayerful. But that dear, little four-letter word: "safe" was one word that most definitely did NOT describe my heart.

What wasn't safe, you might ask? Well, in one, very real sense, Capitol Hill wasn't safe in the early 1990's. There were certain streets you should walk on, and others you most definitely should not. Break-ins, gun fire, car theft, robberies were much more regular occurrences on the Hill at that time. You walked the streets alert during the day; and avoided them alone at night.

But it wasn't city-street safe I was thinking about. Believe it or not, it was being church-aisle safe as Capitol Hill Baptist was considering my husband. I feared the new level of "notice" that was already coming our way as the family of this potential new senior pastor.

The hardest thing about fears is that they are usually based on an element of truth. That's what makes them feel so legitimate. My fears also had a foothold in truth…. God's Truth.

24/7 Job Qualifications
I don't think people feel a need to know much about a plumber's or a doctor's family before they hire him, but people most certainly do in pastoral ministry. And for good reason. This is one profession where life on and off the "work-site" need to match up. Look at what qualifications for being an overseer (another word for a pastor/elder) that Paul shares with young Timothy.

1 Timothy 3: 1 – 7, CSB
This saying is trustworthy: "If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble work. An overseer, therefore, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, self-controlled, sensible, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not an excessive drinker, not a bully but gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy. He must manage his own household competently and have his children under control with all dignity. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God's church?) He must not be a new convert, or he might become conceited and incur the same condemnation as the devil. Furthermore, he must have a good reputation among outsiders, so that he does not fall into disgrace and the devil's trap.

This passage makes it clear: churches are only to call men who will:

- **Furnish** a godly example in their personal lives and in how they pastor.
- **Nourish** the church, equipping them through God's Word and their Christ-like leadership over God's people, and,
- **Flourish** their families through their Christ-like leadership in the home.

Paul repeats these same qualifications to young Titus, but this time uses the scary word "blameless" in the example he furnishes, in his leadership in the church, and in his leadership in his family:

Furnishes a godly example: verses 7-8
"As an overseer of God's household, he must be blameless, not arrogant, not hot-tempered, not an excessive drinker, not a bully, not greedy for money, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled."

Nourishes the church: verse 9
"Holding to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it." (Nourishes the church)

Flourishes the family: verse 6
"An elder must be blameless, the husband of one wife, with faithful children* who are not accused of wildness or rebellion."

*faithful does not mean converted in this context

Pattern, Not Perfect
"Be still, my heart. It's not quite as scary as the word 'blameless' sounds," as my husband was quick to explain. "Blameless" does not mean "perfect". It means that pastors will provide a pattern for God's people, by both their "win" over sin AND by their continued "fight" against it. These are men who teach their church, not only when they preach from the Bible, but as they live their lives, too. God's people watch as these men keep on turning away from sin and keep on seeking to trust in the Lord. They watch as God faithfully grows their leaders through the means He supplies—His Spirit, His Word, and His people. And this encourages members trust their pastors, and even more, the faithful God who has called these men to pastor. Pastors will always be sinners, but they are not to be hypocrites. That made sense. Oh, what good news! The congregation didn't need to see perfection! They most certainly would not see it in my husband or in me!

Cringing over Gazing Rights
But the logical "bad news" in my fearful mind was that only way for a church to discern if a man lives out this pattern of blameless, is "notice." And not just some kind of darting eyes glancing his direction. "Notice" takes "KNOW-tice"—a significant watchfulness on their part and a significant openness on ours. So, there you have it: an invitation for others to take a careful look at any man and his family as a qualification to become their pastor and to stay their pastor. Yikes! And, while this biblical admonition this made it a good and right thing for this congregation to take a carefully look at my husband and our family, the fact remained, I wasn't relishing the process as a "safe" one. Here was a congregation of unknown people about take a penetrating assessment of my husband, our children, myself. Would it be with the eyes of judgment, criticism, fault-finding? Would we meet their list of expectations? Would they see anything worthwhile?

Most everyone goes through life's journey picking up trinkets to stuff in their heart's little carry-on

bag. I had a long line of very hurtful experiences whose memories looked more like monuments than momentos in my baggage. My knee-jerk reaction was to avoid shame and rejection at almost any cost. And, while the good news of the gospel brought me new life and new identity in Christ, these still frequently cast a large shadow across my life. Only the fight for new light each day from the Son of Righteousness in His Word, had been slowly dispelling the darkness.

Even more sobering was the growing realization that if my husband did become senior pastor, this was choosing a life of continued notice. This was an evite to stare and keep on staring. To ask questions and receive honest, even vulnerable answers. The church had been a place where our family had known so much love and acceptance. Would taking on the high-profile position of senior pastor and family be choosing to step into the spotlight of critical evaluation or prove to be an opportunity to bask more deeply in the light of love of God is found among his people? The fear of my heart tipped my anticipations towards a harsh, penetrating beam of fault-finding. Oh, how I dreaded the thought of it!

You would think I had the opportunity to conquer such fears with our previous experiences in the ministry. Mark had been a pastor, and us, a pastor's family, before. There was the tiny church plant in Topsfield, Massachusetts that Mark helped start during his student days up at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary. And there were also the sweet years at Eden Baptist in England where Mark had served at associate pastor after he finished his PhD at Cambridge. But both of those pastoral settings seemed so different from this position at Capitol Hill Baptist. They had happened so naturally. The church plant in Topsfield had evolved from our youth-group turned young adults. And at Eden, we were known and loved, and had served as one of many student families, long before being called as an associate pastor there. In both of these churches, becoming a pastor was simply given a greater opportunity to love and serve those who we knew and loved already. And, perhaps more to the "notice" point: who knew and loved us already.

But this time we were almost completely unknown. Only the respected, older member of CHBC who put forth Mark's name to the search committee knew anything about us. That lack of knowledge showed itself how? As immediate rejection. The pastoral search committee took one glance at Mark's birthdate (he was 32) and felt no need look further. He was ten years younger than their ideal candidate. Not a very encouraging start, right?

The Scoop on CHBC

Now don't get the wrong idea about Capitol Hill Baptist. There was nothing exceptionally judgmental or scary about these people. Actually, the large majority of them were very godly, welcoming and kind, as I would soon find out. And it even made sense why they might be put off by Mark's youth. In previous decades, this church had once been one of the largest ones in the District of Columbia. Now numbers -- both in members and in dollar signs – – were in deep decline. They had even been considering shutting the church doors completely.

Not only was the congregation dwindling, but it was suffering. They had just let go their previous pastor after he failed them and his family. They were hurt. They were wary. They weren't sure if they even wanted to try another pastor. I guess you could say they loved that little four-letter word "safe" is much as I did. I was looking for safety from scrutiny, criticism, and rejection. They were looking for safety from secret sins, hypocrisy, and poor leadership.

Put off by his age, but still in need of someone to fill their pulpit, Mark was invited to preach one Sunday. God kindly used my husband to nourish the congregation in His Word that Lord's Day. They were hungry for more. Perhaps this young "whippersnapper" might be the last – shot pastor they were looking for after all.

That Sunday began a conversation that would lead to more visits, more preaching, lots of personal reference checks, and eventually Q & A interviews of both Mark and me. And with these would come, as I both expected and dreaded, the questions and assessments of not just Mark, but about me and the kids. What would Mark say? How would I prepare for these? And even if we made it through the candidating and were called, how could I possibly be what they were looking for in ministry life, itself? Would the rejection that came based on age alone be replaced with more rejection once they really got to know us? What could I do to keep safe through this?

The Princess of Wow and Her Side-Kicks

While my husband assured me that "blameless" did not mean perfect, it was very tempting to want to seem to be as perfect as possible. What could be safer to score high with all those church members with "gazing" rights? What was the perfect pastor's wife like? I'm not sure who yours is, but mine was the people-pleasing Princess of Wow. As her name implies, this P.O.W. was sure to impress… and to keep me and even our family safe. After all, how can you criticize someone who has everything you are looking for? Someone dare I say… perfect? How can you not want a showboat like her to be the "First Lady" of your church, as some nickname the pastor's wife? It's rather embarrassing, but I think you need to meet my "imaginary friend." Here she is…

First of all, the Princess of Wow is beautiful! If there was a style magazine for pastor's wife she would be on the front cover. She always wears a cute little tailored suit with even cuter, little matching shoes. Her makeup is perfect, her nails manicured, and her hair style has just that right combination of stylish without being outlandish.

She's hard to miss at church, whether it's sitting on the front pew with their quiver-full of well-behaved children or joining her husband by the church door to greet you on the way out! Greet you she does, with a great, big smile, and always by name.

And it's not just your name she remembers. It's lots of details about your life, too. And those children you saw sit next to her on the front pew, when you get to know than you realize that they are fully – catechized, quietly obedient, little Bible scholars, converted at an early age, and who just can't wait to get inside those church doors again.

And that's good, because that's where their mother is a lot of the time. She is an indispensable part of the church's ministry. People count on her to lead Bible studies, the women's ministry and children's ministry—or at very least, play the piano.

But her perfection doesn't end in the church. Just look at her house! It is always perfectly clean and a cup of coffee and some sort of sweet nibble seems to magically appear at your place, even when you drop in at a moment's notice. But more likely than not, she's knocking at YOUR door, visiting you when you're sick or have just had a baby; bringing you a meal, dropping off a Scripture-filled encouraging note.

It's amazing how she always seems to be there for you when you need her. Really, she finds time to meet with everyone and do everything. On top of all this, she certainly is always there for her husband; and of course, her children who she homeschools on top of caring for all their other needs

Juxtaposition: Definition #1

This was the Princess of Wow that I imagined that the congregation would be pleased to see in me. And if one word (besides perfect) could be used to describe her, it would be juxtaposition. What is juxtaposition? "Placed close together or side-by-side something, for comparison or contrast," as dictionary definition number 1 puts it. "Superwoman and Mrs. St. Paul wrapped up in one, tidy, little package," as I put it, with the glorious rays from the church's stained-glass window shining down God's approval upon her glistening, perfectly hair–sprayed hair. Stick her side by side with the other women in the church, and you could not but marvel at the contrast. Hallelujah, we have a real pastor's wife!!! She's everything godly women aspire to be, inside and out.

I was both repelled and attracted to this little lady. Repelled, because she seemed so fake, so unknowable, so juxtaposed from everyone else. But that was exactly what attracted me to her, too. She was a bastion of perfection! And in my safe-seeking heart, that made her a tank. That kind of woman could be a "safe" woman in what looked to me like a potentially very unsafe ministry land.

Less Like David, More Like Saul

If I had to admit, my tendencies were to be like King Saul, the man who DIDN'T write Psalm 16, and who lost the throne of Israel to the man who DID write Psalm 16--David. David was a man after God's own heart. Sadly, Saul was not. Samuel had anointed Saul as king of Israel. This was a sign that the LORD had chosen him and would be with him throughout his rule. He was Israel's earthly king who lived under the heavenly king. Saul need only trust in the LORD and carry out His plans. Sounded simple. Sounded exciting.

But when it was time for Saul to show himself to the people, he got scared. He knew he didn't have the strength in himself to be king over this people! But instead of seeking the LORD for what he needed, he hid among the baggage. And when the LORD's plans did not follow the schedule Saul anticipated, Saul acted ditched God's plans and came up with his own. Despite the LORD's warnings, Saul did this time after time after time. So, in the end, David, a man with a heart that loved God and wanted to do whatever He wanted him to do, was given the throne instead.

Unfortunately, figuring out how to keep myself safe from the criticisms of others was only one of the ways I looked more like Saul than David. Dr. Seuss' Cat in the Hat had "Thing 1 and Thing 2" in his bag of tricks--the two companions who loved to come out and bring even more mischief to the room. But my Princess of Wow my struggle to keep my worth in Christ as I deal with feelings of inadequacy based on my works or others' comments, had more sidekicks than the Cat had in his carpet bag.

That cool cat only had Thing 1 and 2 to jump out of his carpet bag and make mischief. But, my Princess of Wow had Thing 1, 2, AND 3 in her shoe-matching purse: three questions of fearful anticipation that loved to come out and stir up even more fear about ministry life. I call them the What Sisters: "What-if?", "What-now?", and "What-next?"

Let me introduce them and the trouble they stirred up in my heart:

"What-if?": What difficulties might come to my family because of ministry life?

- Will I be able to handle my husband's long hours of work?
- Will our kids be taunted and teased about being pastors' kids by other kids at school or even in church?
- Wil life in the ministry damage them? Will they become "classic PK's" who grow up hating the church and rebelling against everything we've taught them?

- Will the church be stingy with the salary they give us to live on? Will they give us a mere pittance of money, just enough to scrape by on, calling it "keeping them humble so they have to live by faith"?
- Will I be able to find true friendship within the church or will there only be curiosity seeking gossipers? How will I be able to tell the difference anyway?
- Will my heart become bitter with unjust, critical comments about my husband or in the aftermath of some church power struggle?
- What if my husband has to meet with women and become more attracted to someone other than me?

"What-now?": How will I cope when a particular difficulty actually does come?

- How will I handle loneliness of sending my husband to another meeting in the evening?
- Who will be there to help me, help us through those times?
- How will I be able to cope if our kids do hate the church and do not become Christians?
- How will I be able to handle gossip and unfair criticism when it comes?
- How will we handle insufficient funds for a good retirement or to send the kids to private instead of the very poor public schools only available at the time?
- If my heart begins to become bitter and unforgiving, will God be able to thaw it and help me love again?
- Will God really be enough to help us through these hard times?

"What next?": How will I cope with seismic shifts of change that may come?

- What will we do if the church splits over a difficult situation?
- What will we do if the church decides they don't like my husband and he is forced to resign? How will he find his next job? How will we support our family as he looks for something new?

My Things 1,2 and 3 all had something in common: they were allowing my imagination to roam in a land of fearful possibilities, in a very God-forgetful way.

I had heard so many stories of bad things that happened to pastors and their families. I did not my family to go through these things. I did not want to end up a hurting, bitter, lonely, neglected, hardened pincushion of a woman. I did not want this to be my future. My stomach ached as I thought about the expectations the church might have for our family and what life in the ministry might do to our family.

I had heard so many ministry war stories. Would our family become "collateral damage" for the sake of the gospel? Sounded heroic, but painful. Who in their right mind would choose this nightmarish, imagined life I cooked up, with our family on one side and everyone else peering at us and judging us on the other? Scary. Just plain scary. So very, very un– safe.

So, while being a pastor's wife didn't involve me dodging murder attempts or any of the many other, truly life – threatening situations that David, the author of Psalm 16, faced (and may have had in mind when he composed this psalm). But for me, it nonetheless was terrifying. With David, I've cried out, "Keep me safe, O LORD! Keep my husband safe. Keep our kids safe." But with Saul, my heart was tempted to seek my own kind of safe, not in God but in someone like the Princess of Wow.

My Husband and the Princess of Wow

The Princess of Wow and her bag of buddies, the What Sisters, were no secret to my husband. They were no new concoctions of my heart. The truth is, none of them had much to do with the ministry. They had been with me for years. Ministry was just a chance for my fears to come out and "play" in a new room. And for my Princess of Wow to go out shopping for a new protective "outfit"—the perfect pastor's wife.

I had seen how helpful meditating on and even praying God's Word for myself and my family, helped keep the Princess and her companions under lock and key. But sometimes, after a particularly critical comment or hurtful failed expectation, I let her out to stand next to me.

In juxtaposition to her, the contrast made me weep:

"The Princess of Wow wouldn't have been found wanting, if she had been a part of a certain conversation I had been in that morning…because she always knows the right thing to say."

"The Princess of Wow wouldn't have dashed the hopes someone it they had been expecting her help in a certain situation… because she is always there to be what you want her to be."

"The Princess of Wow could have said "yes" and figured out how to juggle another obligation to her already filled schedule…. Because she always finds time for everyone." "Her kids would never had said anything hurtful to that other person's child… because she is a perfect mom and her kids are perfectly behaved, etc." went the dialogue in my head.

The faulty logic in my head said that if I could be the Princess of Wow, I would not only have been a friend/wife/mother but would also be safe from criticism that hurt so deeply. But since I could not be her, she left me tempted to feel like a different kind of P.O.W.—a Prisoner of War—held captive by a desire to find safety in the significance that people set upon me. I guess these days that is called "fear of man" plain and simple.

Even though the Princess of Wow had been around a long time, my husband knew that she would be a particularly big temptation to me as we took steps towards pastoring at CHBC. He (rightly) supposed ministry life as we were considering, would a lot more opportunities to feel and even fail to meet others' expectations. And not just here at the onset of candidating, but again and again throughout the years in the ministry.

If we were to accept this position, Mark wanted us to have a ministry-shaped marriage: one in which our hearts and lives would be bound up in furnishing a godly example and nourishing the members in our local church. Would my fears keep me from having a ministry-shaped marriage like this? Or would it lead to me being disheartened, ashamed, and wanting to withdraw from the very people we would be called to love and serve? We needed to carefully consider this. That would not be good for the church, for me, for Mark, or our family.

Considering what was good for me wasn't just my husband's personal priority. It was a biblical one. Biblically, Mark's first job was to be a good husband to me and a good father to our kids. 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 say a man needs to manage his household well in order to be qualified to be a pastor/elder.

Managing sounds like simply a submissive wife and obedient kids. But it MEANS caring for them in a way that they flourish, relationally, spiritually, mentally, and physically. If Mark became the pastor of this church, he would offer to care for them with a marriage-shaped ministry: a ministry with limits that made it possible for our marriage (and family) would FLOURISH as he NOURISHED the church with his leadership and FURNISHED a godly example for their lives as he did so.

That meant that an integral part of deciding upon this pastoral position from our side was whether this would be good for me (and our family) spiritually. Could I flourish in this situation, given my weaknesses? Could our family?

Of course, it is always good to fight sinful tendencies. God will use every circumstance in our lives for our good and to transform us into the likeness of His Son. So, I don't mean to convey that Mark would choose not to pursue this pastoral position to keep me from growing or facing my sin issues. But, as a gentle shepherd, in keeping with the ways of the Good Shepherd, Mark wanted to take into consideration if this would be a good climate or too harsh of a climate in which the kids' and I could flourish.

So, we talked and talked about it all. And as I shared my fears and we considered this position, he told me once more about the P.O.W. he loved far more than the Princess of Wow. Someone who he wanted me to be and God wanted me to be. Someone who was a far better partner to that aspiring overseer in 1 Timothy and Titus: a Plain, Ordinary Woman, not an imprisoned P.O.W., enslaved by people-pleasing, but finding her freedom and safety in God and His P.O.W.--Promises of the Word.

"Keep me safe, O God!" This woman faced enemies by turning to same One David did in Psalm 16. His faithful God. Her faithful God. Her identity wasn't in her works, but in those of her God, on her behalf. The good news of the gospel meant that as someone who had turned away from my sins and trusted in Jesus as my Savior, I was in fact a prisoner no more.

I was a beautiful, new creation, forgiven and freed through Christ. I had been long known, loved and chosen by Him to be His dearly loved daughter from before the world began. Before He spoke "Let there be light," He had already prepared good works for me to do. Works that He would empower me to do, giving me the will to do and act according to His good purpose by His Holy Spirit living and working inside of me. And He did this for me, not because I was a Princess of Wow or anything special in myself. This is what He does for all his people, who like me, are Plain, Ordinary Sinners in need of a Savior.

And what specific good works did I know the LORD had planned for me? Mark was full of advice here: "Be the plain, ordinary woman that God created you to be. You can never over trust God. He will keep you safe. His promises are true! Be my Genesis 2 helper that I need you to be. Let's work together to fulfill the good works God has planned for us. Bring the comments and criticisms of others to me. We can weigh their value together and not let them enslave you," Mark said.

"A Plain, Ordinary Woman is the kind of woman God will use not only to bless me and our family, but also to encourage the other women in the church. Someone just like them: a sinner saved by grace and daily dependent on her Savior. A woman who fights back against sin and finds her identity and contentment in Him and His plans for her. In humility and even weakness, God is glorified. You get to be a Princess of HIS Wow, HIS glory, not yours. And that's what really makes you a Princess of Wow in my eyes," Mark encouraged me.

Part 4: Kicking the Side-Kicks in the Seat of the Pants

And what about my Princess'Thing 1, 2 and 3: What-if, What-now, and What-next? Who could protect me from becoming a Prisoner of War to those fears I worried would come in this "un-safe" land of ministry? God gives hundreds of promises of the Word that spoke to these, too. Here in Romans 8, they are all addressed.

Take a Whiff of This, What-if's!

God's promise from Romans 8:28-30: "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified."

God reminded me that His sovereign plan encompasses everything that happens in my life. With Him, there are no if's. With Him, there are no unplanned events or unredeemed outcomes. I can rest in the promise that all will be for my good and His glory. He will use it all to make me into the likeness of His Son.

Let's Throw Those What-Now's under the Bus

1. God's Promise from Romans 8:18:
   "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us."

What-Now's will be difficult, but they will not last! They may seem to tower over us, but the glory is coming will dwarf them.

2. God's Promise from Romans 8:26-27:
   "In the same way the Spirit also helps us in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

When What-Now's come, I'm going to feel my own weakness, but God will help me by His Holy Spirit. Jesus will be praying for me. And if Jesus prays for it, you KNOW it's going to happen!

Encouraging Context for the What-Next's:

God's promise from Romans 8:31-39:
"What, then, are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He did not even spare his own Son but gave him up for us all. How will he not also with him grant us everything? Who can bring an accusation against God's elect? God is the one who justifies. Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who died, but even more, has been raised; he also is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us. Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: Because of you we are being put to death all day long; we are counted as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

God is always for us and with us. The battle may be fierce, but the victory is won because of Him. His love and power will conquer every foe we face.

These promises were the encouragement I needed! The LORD would keep me safe. Not safe by protection myself by a shell of feigned perfection. Not safe by avoiding criticism, suffering or hardship. But nonetheless perfectly safe in Him: His person, His plans, and His promises. Together we chose to continue pursuing the pastoral opportunity at CHBC. I could depend on the Lord to keep me, to keep us, safe. Safe from real harm and safe enough to offer His real love to this congregation of people just as sinful, imperfect and needy as myself.

Back to the Story Line

So back to the story…What DID my husband say when he was candidating and the questions about us came up? Did he reply, "She'll take care of women's ministry. She'll work with the children. She will accompany me on visitations"? Did he wow them with some amazing gifts of service they could expect from me? No, he didn't.

"She will seek to love the Lord, love me and our family, and love His church," was his simple reply. "She will be my wife, the mother of our children, and a faithful servant alongside you all. Then he added, "Don't forget: you will be hiring me; not my wife. It's not that the Lord hasn't gifted my wife in ways that I hope will be a blessing to the church. It's just I'm not going to mention those things here as expectations of things you can count on her doing. While she will serve the church just like any other woman in the church, there is one job I need her to do, and I want you to want her to do, that no other woman can do: support me so that I can be a good pastor to you."

Juxtaposition: Definition #2

Right from the beginning Mark made it clear to the congregation that I wasn't going to be a Princess of Wow. Nor should they count on me being an additional member of the church staff. I would be his wife who lived in juxtaposition to him in this new calling. No, not juxtaposition according to the first dictionary definition—"in contrast to something" as you might expect from the Princess of Wow. But juxtaposition according to the dictionary's second meaning of the word: "closely connected to something."

This was the juxtaposition of the Plain, Ordinary Woman. Mark wanted me to be closely connected to the Lord as my first love. Closely connected to our local church, as a loving, faithful member among many. Closely connected to him, helping him be the good husband and father to our family God's Word called him to be. And, supporting him that he might be a good and faithful pastor to the local church.

And, closely connected to eternity, knowing that hurts would come as sure as the sun would be to rise, but that the Lord had plans for our good and his glory through them all that we would see in eternity, if not sooner, my husband, my family, and the other members of the church in a way that fulfills the biblical roles for all wives, mothers, and church members, and that which also makes the most of the special opportunities that I have to complement his ministry. That's what my husband taught his congregation –to–be that evening to encourage me to be.

Promises Made, Promises Kept

The rest is history. The church did vote to call Mark to be the pastor here at Capitol Hill Baptist Church. Mark accepted and we have served here for over twenty-five years. God has been good. And Mark was right: seeking to be a Plain Ordinary Woman, relying upon God and the Promises of His Word, has not only proved to be freeing for me and helpful to my husband and our family, but it has proved to be good, even fruitful, for the church, too.

God has been teaching us what it means to have a ministry-shaped marriage and increasingly given us such a marriage focused on nourishing and being humble example to this local church. And God has also been teaching us what it means to have a marriage-shaped ministry and increasingly given us a marriage (and family) that flourishes, even as we nourish the church.

And what has happened to the Princess of Wow? Yes, I've had many a tussle with that little lady. I frequently fight to find my "safe" in God instead of her fake protective shell. Good thing my husband came built with a sturdy "Press Repeat" button. There have been many times when he has had to remind me to be a Plain Ordinary Woman, depending upon the Promises of God's Word, as I have navigated the

failed expectations of myself and others. God has used Mark to use my continued struggles to show me more of my mis-identity and to turn to God yet again for my true identity.

But it has been Mark's daily encouragement in the very ordinary practicalities of life that has greatly helped me accept this identity as good and right. On some days, Mark has thanked me by partnering with him in hospitality, by discipling women, by teaching in children's ministry, or by using some other gift. Gifts that might look a bit "Princess of Wow" on the outside, but by God's grace, flow from a heart of love, not identity-hunger on the inside.

On other days, Mark has stepped over a mountain of dog hair and dust bunnies to kiss me and thank me for simply having a dinner of boxed Kraft Mac and Cheese and keeping the kids alive, when he was called away on a pastoral emergency. Most days, life have looked like something in between these.

And what about my Things 1,2 and 3 (the"What-ifs, What-nows and What-nexts")? Some of them have happened. Many have not. Ministry life HAS been rough on our kids at times. I HAVE run home from church crying more times than I can count on my toes and fingers combined. We HAVE made mistakes. We HAVE disappointed people. The congregation ISN'T always one, big, happy family. There have even been times when Mark has thought about resigning as pastor because the struggles were so hard for me.

But always, always, God has been so good and bigger than them all. He has indeed used all things for the good and to transform us increasingly into the likeness of His Son. Along with David I can say, "Surely goodness and mercy has followed me and my whole family all the days of my life here at CHBC (Psalm 23:6) We have needed His mercies every morning and He has always provided it.

No, it is not arrived like a box from Amazon. It has been given slowly, but surely, through his Spirit, through His Word, through His people, and through life. Through good, very sweet times and through very hard and painful knocks. But all, always, for our good and His glory.

And far more than any scary "What-if, What-now and What-next" stories I can tell you, have been the sweet blessings we have known. So many fellow members it has been a joy and honor to serve alongside! Some of the best friends of our lives. Some of the richest times in God's Word. Getting to have a front row seat to transformation in hundreds, even thousands of lives in our days here.

And oh, the singing every Sunday! It is a foretaste of heaven! "Keep me safe, O God." That has been my prayer that has been answered with over twenty-five years of yes. "Oh, thank You, God, for keeping me and my family safe in Your way, not in mine! You always know best and do best!"

If you are reading this, chances are you are a pastor's wife or are thinking about becoming one. I don't know if you have a Princess of Wow heart – attitude you struggle with or if you are given to many What-if, What-now, or What-next fears like me. Perhaps your struggles are completely different from mine; but I can assure you that the same God who has helped me and my family, can and will help yours.

He has prepared good works for you and your husband to do from before the foundations of the world. And that includes good works at the church He is calling you and your husband to serve. He will give you everything you need to nourish the church, to flourish your family, to furnish them with a godly example. And in the process, He will grow Your love for Him, for the church, and for your family--all for your good and His glory.

From Section 1: Living in Christ in a Life of Notice

"Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge.." Psalm 16:1

Transitioning to a New Ministry: What to Expect and How to Do It

Transition Has Lots of Layers

When your husband is called to a new ministry situation, you don't just move your furniture. You move your friendships, your lifestyle, your customs, your weather, your children's education, your church style (usually), your sense of direction, your favorite places to eat and shop, your budget, your home, your husband's career… And sometimes even your language. That's a lot of change!

Some of these elements might take just days or weeks to adjust to. Others of them will take months or even years. Some of them might seem like you can never adjust to them. And the more you loved something or someone in the place where you were previously, many times the harder the transition into your current situation will be. Even if you appreciate and are excited about the new life you are beginning, transition can still be very difficult and take quite a while. So here are a few tips to help you through transition.

Cut Yourself Some Slack

You have just experienced a loss of people, places, things that you love… Probably even lots of them! No matter how excited you are about the new situation, you're probably going to have periods when you are just plain sad! It's okay! It's natural.

Borrow from God's Past Goodnesses

Remember back to the last situation: it wasn't always familiar. You probably couldn't have guessed all the great things God was going to do in your life/your husband's life/in the church, and all the things he provided for you in that place, could you? Of course, not! God's goodness will be just as evident one day you in this new situation. He may provide different things and people… Actually, you pretty much can count on that! But he has just as many good works prepared for you in this new situation as he did in that last situation. Thank him now… Even before he does them! Testify to his faithfulness while it is still an act of faith – – that is, while it's not by sight yet! And it's okay that you're crying and sad while you're doing this!

Leave and Cleave

Watch your heart for a continued pattern of comparison to your last situation. This new place is like a new wineskin. God plans to do a different work in you, in your husband, and among different people. He has called your whole family to this new situation, not just your husband. God has new things for you all in this place. He will grow you in new ways and usually new ways. Ask for his help to appreciate what you had before, but not to make it a stumbling block and wholeheartedly embracing what God's plans are for you all in this new place.

Pray that God would work in your hearts. Especially what your comparative comments made around your children who are old enough to understand what you are saying. You will be affecting their transition, too. It's okay for them in you both to miss things from where you used to live, but make sure you also point out new things and your faith in God's purpose for you all in this new time and place.

Find a Friend or Two
It's often hard to break into new friendships. Don't wait for people to initiate. See if you can find another woman the same season of life as you who can take you to the grocery store with her… Or go on a walk or hang out while you fold laundry together… Or go for coffee. One caution: the more prominent your husband's position, the more careful you do need to be about who you form deeper friendships with.

Ask your husband if he can think of someone who might be a good person to befriend. You also may find that doing things casually with a number of people for while helps you to know who is safe to talk to about deeper things related to you and your husband, your family, etc. Oftentimes another pastor's wife, staff wife, or elders wife is a good place to start. Even if they are very busy themselves, chances are you can trust her judgment on who might make a good friend to seek out.

Don't Be Surprised If You Feel Lonely
Even if you have lots of people asking to do things with you! There is a level of close friendship that just takes time! Ask God for grace to help you! Keep persevering! It doesn't hurt to call her old friend or two from your previous location. Just watch your heart, that you don't slow down working on making new friendships at your new location because you have stayed dependent upon your old friends too long.

Seize the Day!
You will never get back this day again! Your time in this new place may be shorter than you think. Before you know it, you will be somewhere else in these times in this new place will be the good old days you look fondly back on. Don't waste your time by just thinking about what is different or missing or hard! Enjoy one of those new things… Go get lost trying to find somewhere new… Take a chance on serving someone else. Not sure who to reach out to? Ask your husband or others you're getting to know. They can help you learn some new things to do or some people you could serve that would so appreciate your help this very day! Don't waste it

Get Involved… Just Slowly and Carefully
Seek your husband's advice on where you might serve. Usually, wisdom would have this piece something you all do together – – such as have a couple over to eat, or to do something the doesn't involve leadership for a long-term commitment – – like serving the nursery or helping give out cookies and coffee at the hospitality desk or something else that allows you to meet people, serve people, but not yet lead people. Allow your husband to settle into his ministry first. This will let him know how best your service in a church can support him without burning out your self or the family.

Be Patient with and Supportive of Your Husband
Remember he's in transition, too! He's trying to figure out this new position. He's trying to figure out how to balance care for you, your family, and the church. Even if he's done this and other churches before, there is bound to be enough differences between the two situations that there are things he's trying to figure out.

Be an Asker
During the transition time, one of the best things you can do is ask your husband how you can help them… As he strives to be a godly man, husband, father, pastor. This could be everything from praying to him to helping him figure out how to balance the new pattern of committee meetings was special time at home with you and the kids… Or it might be asking you to meet up with a particular woman in the church. Pray that God would give your husband wisdom answering how you can help them. I've been amazed at the different ways God has answered this in our lives.

Be a Teller

Share with your husband your transition struggles. He needs to know them to help provide for you and your family. I'm not saying make this into a complaint fast, nor am I encouraging you to think that your husband will be able to take away all of your struggles. I'm just saying, let him know what is hard for you. Together you may be able to speak your out some things that help you through these days. If he doesn't know what you're going through, then you can't help you, make changes, or pray for you!

Places Where You Live and Places Where You Visit

In other words, there some things you and/or your husband might do short term but should not do in the long term. Examples: lots of committee meetings night after night, but no date or family time. Lots a long phone calls to old friends, but not much effort towards making new friends. Transition is famous for the "Honey, I'm sorry, but I just God to have his extra meeting about the finances, missions, youth group, whatever. I won't be home until late." In some ways this is okay. There are a lot of new things your husband has to learn – – – and unfortunately, they all take time.

But, if you are still seeing too many of these extra meetings, months after months down the road, it will very likely take its toll on your family. You may need to humbly, winsomely, and respectfully bring up this harmful pattern with your husband. And don't forget to pray for God to go before you and help him see the difficulty before you even bring it up.

Remember that God is in this transition! He has good plans for you, your husband, your family, and the church He has called you to. And not just in the future, but even in this very day of transition. Trust in His goodness. He is always worthy of it!

From Section 1: Living in Christ in a Life of Notice

"Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge.." Psalm 16:1

Dealing with Expectations

"She took her place in the seat that was to symbolize her role—a high bench facing the congregation, where everyone could notice the least flicker of expression. Sarah had been prepared for this exposed position every Sunday of her childhood… but it was different to he, herself, the Minister's Wife. Other women could yawn or furtively twitch a numbed foot in the cold of a January morning in an unheated building. Never she. Others could have weekday lapses—snarl at stupid tradesmen or admit to simple fatigue—but when the minister's wife showed human frailties, it was the subject of conversation."
-- describing Sarah Edwards, the seventeen-year-old wife of pastor Jonathan Edwards, July 1727

Have you struggled with ministry expectations for your husband, yourself and your family? Do you ever feel everyone's eyes are on you, like Sarah Edwards did? Has the Princess of Wow wanted to make an appearance at your church? Are the expectations you feel coming from within you or are they coming from the church itself?

Usually, they originate from a variety of sources. Sometimes we can THINK they are coming from others, when really, like in my case, many came from my own heart. Wherever they come from, expectations have a terrible way of putting us on the defensive among the very people God is calling us to give our hearts to in love.

Let's look at common sources of expectations and some practical suggestions for coping with each.

Church Expectations

1. Church Expectations from What the Last Pastor (and Family) Did (or Didn't Do)
You aren't the only one coming to a ministry situation with baggage. Your church is, too. Everyone except perhaps a brand-new Christian has probably been in a church before. It might be the church where your husband is pastoring, or it may be a totally different church. The point it, there is a past with a pastor in it. It is quite natural for church members to wonder what will be the same and what will be different about your husband, in terms of how he will pastor them, and in terms of how he and his family will interact with the church.

You can expect comparisons. Some of these will be favorable, but some of them may not be. Many might FEEL unfavorable, but actually are mainly just innocent, out-loud observations. Some may be tinged with disappointment or even defensiveness from those who miss the previous pastor. Others may be pinning future hopes of change that your husband may bring. Many will probably be mildly curious and broadly supportive.

Ideas to Think about
One of the best ways to meet these expectations is to expect them. See their comments as opportunities to understand these people and how to pray for them. Somehow reminding myself that this is to be expected helps keep me from being defensive. God is calling my husband to feed the sheep. These comments are a way for us to know what they are hungry for. Some will need to gently have their appetites changed in the process. Others might be ready for what your husband is already planning to put in their food buckets.

I've also found it helpful to think of a loving response to comments ahead of time. If someone has specific ideas for my husband, I politely encourage them to talk to him directly about them. Pray that God would prepare you give you and your husband meet their expectations by a steady focus on loving the members but giving your hearts to Him first of all. This is God's church. He will help your husband set a course and a pace that is best.

2. Church Expectations for Friendship

With there being only one pastor and family and often many members, the odds are not in your favor to be everyone's best friend. Sometimes, the odds aren't even in favor of remembering everyone's name! Finding out that the pastor and his wife have friends can be very hard for some in your church. So hard, that some people advise not to make friends within your church. We even had one case where a woman left the church because I wasn't her friend! But… only one in 30+ years.

Ideas to Think about

Mark and I have both found friends within the church but have been careful in choosing them and in not flaunting them—no social media selfies with the besties, etc. He has encouraged these friendships, not just because we need friends, but also because he felt it is good for the church to let his pastor and family be people. And it would be better to expose and gently confront the sin of friendship envy is actually better for the congregation, even though it can be harder on us. Again, looking to the heart helps. People who are envious are sinning, yes, and that needs to be confessed and addressed. But often it is struggle with loneliness or feeling worthless, also. There are ways we can use their expressed expectations to actually minister to their hearts with the love of Jesus.

3. Church Expectations for Behavior

Sometimes expectations for our behavior are as "simple" as cultural differences. I remember one woman telling me when they moved to a church in the deep South from having been in the north, that it was a big deal to some of the older ladies if she didn't wear pantyhose. They didn't think it was proper to wear a dress without them. Some churches might expect your husband to always wear a suit and tie and you to be dressed in your finest. Others may think you're showing off if you dress up. Some churches think their pastor's family should never drink, even if Scripture allows it in moderation. What if you or your husband enjoy a glass of wine occasionally? Other churches think dancing of any kind, even something that is as tame as square dancing, should never be allowed. What will you do if your daughter gets asked to prom? In some churches, it is a big deal whether you homeschool or send your kids to public or private school.

Ideas to Think about

Expectations from the church for your behavior can't be addressed with a blanket disregard or regard. Here are three biblical ideas that are helpful in weighing our response to church members' expectations:

- Romans 14:19-21:
  "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a person to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall.

- 1 Corinthians 9:19-23:
  "I have become all things to all men, so that I may save some."

- 1 Timothy 3:4:
  "He must manage his own family well."

The first biblical truth helps us consider whether our behavior will actually be harmful to others' spiritual good. The second biblical truth helps us consider whether our behavior will impact someone else's ability to receive the gospel. And the third biblical truth helps us think through whether our behavior is important for the good management of our family.

Not wearing pantyhose in the deep South might not bother as many older older women upsas it used to, but wearing them might help me look more presentable, and oddly enough, open a door that could lead to a gospel conversation with one of the women who still care about that very much. (I've seen odder things happen!)

Choosing public school over homeschool might be a stumbling block for some of the families at your church, but your husband knows you and your kids best. Sometimes, homeschooling strains family relationships in unhelpful ways. Sometimes, a wife isn't a great fit to be their kids' teacher, either because of her abilities or their needs.

Managing your family in the best way for them often includes choosing something that might be difficult for certain church members. Drinking wine might be troubling to so many at your church that you never do it at home or around church members, but you might do it in moderation when you're on vacation in Florida.

These three principles:
(1) What is good for God's people,
(2) What commends the gospel, and
(3) What is good for our family are what have helped us find the path of love through many gray areas of behavior expectations.

4. Church Expectations for Discipleship
I have no idea what the demographics are like at your church, but in our church we have a lot of younger people and few older people. Many of those younger people would love a Titus two-like relationship with an older godly man or woman, but the odds are not in their favor. There are so few to go around. Add in the hope that not just any older godly woman, but that the pastor's wife might be available to disciple you, and the potential for disappointment, envy, and even anger goes up. This is the discipleship version of friendship envy that I mentioned before. And for some reason, because it has to do with growing in the Lord, and that's what the pastor is being paid to do, there can be a bit of a expectation that we should be available to spend time with them like this in a small group setting or even in a one-to-one relationship.

This has been one of the hardest expectations that pastors' wives at our church have experienced. Sometimes it's hard because we really want to disciple the person making the request. Oh, how we want to see them grow, and would love to be a regular part of that! But schedule or other constraints make it impossible. Other times, it's hard because the person's expectation is that because our husbands are pastors, we SHOULD be available to disciple them, forgetting that we are a finite family who can only give so much.

Ideas to Think about
As hard and even as hurtful sometimes it can be to say no to someone who wants you to disciple them, it is a wonderful opportunity to disciple them – – – just not HOW they thought they would be discipled. It's a great opportunity to encourage them in their desire to grow but point them to someone on staff who can connect them with someone who has time to disciple them or a small group to join. Pray with

them right then and there, asking God to provide someone for them to meet with. That shows you care.

But this is also is a great opportunity to help them understand your very real limits. Often, I offer to meet with them once. Even these single meetings can be such sweet times. I take time to get to know them better and pray for them. I thank them for asking me to disciple them but explain that supporting Mark and caring for the kids/other commitments already in place are all that Mark and I feel I have capacity for, right now.

Sometimes, this answer is understood and appreciated readily. But other times, the immediate response is not so pleasant. It might even be many years later before understanding clicks in. I remember one teenage girl being very upset with me for wanting me to disciple her when I had just had our first child. She did not understand why I didn't have time for her during our daughter's naptime. But do you know, years later when she had HER first child, she came back and apologized. She understood that nap times were not necessarily free times but more like sanity times for a new young mother like me. The Lord used me to disciple that teenage girl, just not in the way she expected… and not in the time frame I expected. God never wastes anything!

Another solution we found was to ditch the sit-down-and-study-the-Bible disciple time for join-me-along-in-life informal approach. In particularly busy seasons of life, this was all I could offer. More distractions, but also sometimes the double benefit of giving the person a view into your life even as you are talking about spiritual things.

5. Church Expectations for Hospitality
In some churches, there is a high expectation that a pastor and his family would either have you over for dinner or you will go to their house for dinner. This might be with or without your children. While pastors and their families are most definitely called to be hospitable, a pastor is also called to manage his family well. If your church is small, this kind of hospitality might be really possible. But if your church is large, you could have people over for dinner or you be over at someone's house most every night of the week. And that's not managing your family well.

Ideas to Think about
We've learned that different seasons of our lives allow for different amounts of hospitality at our house or over someone else's house. And while people don't like to be turned down for dinner and they most certainly like to be asked to dinner our house and sometimes wonder why we have it ask them over) this is another way that our husbands and as alongside them get to teach the church how to care well for their pastor's family by allowing them to be finite.

We also learned to structure our calendar to allow for having people over regularly or going over someone's house. And we've learned that different sized events create different atmospheres of hospitality. And most importantly, different seasons in life tend towards different kinds of hospitality.

When we were first at Capitol Hill Baptist Church, we would have an open house so that most of our small membership could come through the house and enjoy a little time of fellowship with us. Later on, we had a mix of members and visitors over after the morning service. Now we are empty-nesters. Just a couple of "old people." Mark likes/needs to take a nap after the morning service if he's preached, so hospitality usually comes on other nights of the week. In the past few years, my chronic illness has put a much tighter limit on when and how we can be hospitable. My hospital bed is in our dining room! Talk about cramping your style! We have people in our home very rarely for a meal these days, but we might invite them out to eat!

Look at your schedule. Consider your season and your family's needs. Decide out how best to be hospitable within those limits. And overall, spread love and patience with those who would love to get to know you better and yet might not understand why it can't be tonight, and in our case, why it might not ever be at all.

6. Church Expectations for Your Children

Perhaps there is no area charged with more feeling, dare I say angst, than the expectations the congregation might have for your children. Whether it's just basically expecting them to never misbehave, or far worse, to be saved and godly little junior saints from an early age, there can be so much pressure on you and your kids.

I know of one pastor's wife who dreaded going to church with her toddler son. His terrible two phase was more like World War Three. She was doing a great job addressing his behavior, and on the way to winning the "war." But, the battles were constant and very vocal. Those close to their family knew the courageous, consistent fight that was going on. But unfortunately, much of the congregation only witnessed the behavior. It looked to many like the pastor and his wife were not doing a good job managing their household because of their son's behavior, though they were doing a stellar job.

Even if your kids are not in a "little monster" phase, you can feel the "best behavior" pressure. I know we did. On top of that, some church members may have an invalid expectation that pastor's kids should be saved and baptized from an early age or the pastor-dad is a failure. Sometimes, it can be so hard to protect your kids from hypocrisy, bitterness towards the church, and even false conversion.

Ideas to Think about

This was one of the hardest areas for us as our kids were growing up. And we must be far from alone in this, for there's some reason why people have a category for pastors kids' behavior that breaks out when they hit high school or after they leave home in college. Jessica Thompson has written an excellent book called How to Help Your Anxious Teen that you might want to look at. And it doesn't matter if your child is a teenager or not. The concepts are really helpful for loving your children and helping them not feel so much pressure at church, regardless of their age. Barnabas Piper has written a book called The Pastor's Kid that is also really good for understanding the pressures pastors' kids feel and how to help them cope with them.

Dealing with church members' expectations for your kids will very likely not be much fun, but they are filled with opportunities to teach others about what it means to care well for your kids and to raise them that they might be true believers not just great men occurs men occurs mimics or even worse mockers of the church. (See "Helping Your Husband Care Well for the Kids" for more.)

7. Church Expectations for You in the Ministry

Some churches are used to the pastor's wife always standing next your husband greeting people at the exit the service or always sitting in the front pew during the service. Others might be used to the pastor's wife always preparing meals for funerals or leading the women's missionary union. And there's always the classics: playing piano and doing children's ministry. Yet others might expect your husband to be available day and night no matter what for hospital visitation or phone call, regardless of what's going on within your family or other obligations.

Ideas to Think about

Like the expectation for discipleship, this can be some of the most difficult expectations to navigate. They seem to be directly connected to why they are paying your husband to be their pastor. Somehow,

it's easy to forget that they're not paying you to be a second staff member. They become mixed up with good gifts a pastor's wife gave them in service alongside her husband with perks they can count on from her.

As you run into these ministry expectations, you and your husband can talk them through and decide what to do about them. You might not be used to standing next to your husband at the door of and service, but together you might decide to start to do that. It's a great way to meet people and it shows people used to that something familiar. As were playing piano, you might have the skill but it's not a good fit for your family except for on the rare occasion. In making meals for funerals might be completely out of the question.

Yep, and I bet you know what I'm about to say next… Dealing with these expectations are not going to be fun but they are filled with great opportunities to teach them about what a pastor's wife is called to do: support her husband. You can help them learn that your husband and you work together to figure out how you can best support him/your family, and best serve the church as a regular church member. Tell them that you'll get back to them, that you need to talk to your husband first so that together you can make the best decision for your family.

Sometimes their expectation might lead you to doing something you would have never dreamt of doing and it bears wonderful fruit. Sometimes, you come back to them with a "no" which isn't always met with understanding or appreciation. Ask God for grace to keep on loving! But also, use their request for leadership to say thank you that they would ask you to assume such a leadership role in your church.

8. Church Expectations for Your Husband

There are definite, biblical expectations for your husband if he's called to be a pastor or elder. We'll talk a lot more about those in the next chapter. Basically though, a pastor/elder is to be a godly men who cares well for your family while also preaching God's Word and equipping God's people.

Now that sounds straightforward. But of course, the truth is not only will living out those three requirements look different from family to family and guide a guy and church to church, but there are a lot more jobs and a lot more expectations that come with every ministry situation. Some of these are apparent even during the pastoral search interviews. Others of these are lurking in the dark waiting to be found out once you get there.

Ideas to Think about

Before You Are Called:

There is no time where expectations run so high as at the beginning of a ministry, so the more you can find out these expectations before your husband agrees to the position, the better it can be for both your family and the church.

Speak to the former pastor and his family. Ask him what expectations the church had. Get into describe his regular work week and responsibilities. Speak to people who run key ministries in the church find out what their expectations are. Speak to the people most excited that you might be coming and what their hopes are. But also try to find out what those least excited are concerned about and might be negatively expecting. Expectations can be fickle. They can be too big. Or too fast. Or too slow. Just not the right things. But knowing them can be very helpful. You help the church and your family make a better decision on whether calling you is a good fit.

It's also very important that you all have a detailed financial proposal at the time of your husband's calling. It doesn't make you greedy or untrusting of God to need to know what kind of money your husband will make and what kind of benefits the church can provide. This is a part of him managing his family well. Many churches mean well but don't have great salary packages for their pastors. Sometimes, it's because the funds aren't there. But other times, it's because they haven't thought through what a pastor's family needs. This was one of the awkward but very important conversations that Mark had with the CHBC pastor search committee. Awkward, because he was "negotiating" for his family. But so important, because it opened up a new perspective on what it means to care well for a pastor's family so that might stay for a long time. And here we still are, being well cared for, over thirty years later.

If your husband is looking at a position underneath a senior pastor, by all means find out what sort of management that senior pastor intends to provide. And if you're being called to a new position, make sure your job description is written and its practical implications to your family schedule and day to day out workings at church clear. Pray, pray, pray for your husband and for the church considering him as pastor.

Once You Get There:
But even with all this great groundwork done, be prepared to disappoint. My husband tells young man aspiring to be pastors, "Don't be in the ministry if you can't disappoint people. We will disappoint people just about every day." It's hard to hear this. We love to make those we serve happy. But this is a great reminder that we serve God's little children and little children can be fussy as they grow. Pray that God's heart of endearment for them out ways your desire to not disappoint them.

Some of the expectations for my husband that surprised me the most were the expectations that I had for him. Expectations to hit the sermon out of the ballpark each Sunday. Expectations to keep everything calm (the way I liked it), even as he was trying to gently make good changes in the church. Expectations that he would get the family and ministry balance right quickly, to name a few. As his wife and chief supporter, these unrealistic expectations had the power to discourage him more than all the other church members' expectations combined.

Your Expectations

So far most of the expectations have been the expectations that others have upon you or your husband. There's a whole another category of expectations that are also very important to think about: your husband's expectations for the church, for himself, and for you.

1. Your Expectations of Their Expectations

In the previous chapters, I introduced you to many of the expectations that were originating from myself. I hadn't even met the congregation yet, but my heart was already full of these. It is so good to recognize when your heart is the source, not the church. Being forewarned of the faulty earpiece fitted to your heart can help you not over-react in your ministry situation. We all tend to hear based on what we already think. Knowing that you are expecting (or simply fearing) people will respond in particular ways to you, your husband and your family, will pre-dispose you to take their comments to fulfill what your heart was expecting. This is a really good reason to not just listen to yourself, but to have others to be a sounding board for your thoughts and reactions. Your husband, who knows you so well, can be especially good at being a good "hearing aid" for you.

2. Your Husband's (and Your) Expectations for the Church

What expectations do you and your husband have for your church:

- Are you or your husband expecting change to come quickly and easily?

- Are you or your husband expecting this church to be just like the last church you were in in either a good way or difficult?
- Are you expecting to find no friends or for everyone to be your friend?
- Are you expecting to not find any more "cans of worms" than the ones revealed in the pastoral search process?

Ideas to Think about

Take time to talk together about your expectations for the church. Ask God to help you discern we are your being unrealistic or where you're being pessimistic. Pray together about those expectations that God would fulfill them where they are God, he would change them where they are unrealistic or pessimistic. God's perfect timing is never ours, but it is always perfect! Ask Him to give you patience as you wait His timing.

3. Your Husband's and Your Expectations for Him

It is extremely helpful for you to know what your husband's expectations for himself, as pastor, husband and father, particularly if your husband is new to any of these roles. This can help you understand how you can best support him by what you do, how you encourage him, and how you pray for him. It can also be very helpful to reveal unrealistic expectations before they lead to discouragement or bigger problems.

Ideas to Think about

Ask your husband about his expectations for himself, as pastor (Nourisher), husband/father (Flourisher), and in the example of his life (Furnisher). Be careful how you ask him. It can very easily sound like you are taking the role as inquisitor when what you want to be his confidante and "co-dreamer." You are on his team, not about to make a new score chart for how he's doing.

Think through your expectations for him, too. Often these expectations go unacknowledged even to ourselves until some sort of failure to meet them. By identifying your expectations and his, you can work through them to a set of joint, realistic expectations.

Encourage each other with how your expectations both show a desire to love God, God's people and your family. Talk through practical ways you can help him. Take these expectations and pray about them. Good friends, especially good more experienced pastor friends, can be a great way to help your husband develop realistic expectations for himself. Their zeal for the Lord and His people may make him desire to be superman. An older pastor can appreciate your husband's enthusiasm but temper it with a long view of the ministry.

Finding an older pastoral couple to talk to both of you can also be very helpful. They can not only "dial down" any unrealistic expectations but help you learn how to help each other. Any time there is a big change in your family or your church, there will likely need to be a change in expectations or how they are worked out. Talking about the practical repercussions of these changes can help your husband, your church and your family through them. This is especially important for young men in their first pastorate.

4. Your Husband's and Your Expectations for You

You've already heard many of the unrealistic expectations I brought into the ministry. Take time to examine your expectations and bring these to your husband. Talk these through and ask him about his expectations for you. Expectations from your husband are some of the most important expectations you have to think about. You are his helpmate and that puts you right by his side, supporting him as he is pastoring the church.

Ideas to Think about

Especially if you are new to the ministry, seek the advice of an older, godly pastor couple. Learn from their experience instead of just your own school of hard knocks! Why not take the quicker path to oneness if it is available!

But even with the best of advice, there's still a learning curve. If your husband is a new pastor, realize that he is learning every bit as much as you are. There may be things that he expects from you that as he gains experience and maturity, he realizes are not realistic or healthy. Be kind to him as he's learning! He might think that you all should have people over for Sunday lunch every Sunday, even though you have two small kids who need to go down for nap and you are exhausted from tangling with them on your own in the pew, all the way through the service as he's preaching. Perhaps you will have enough forethought to help him see why that might not be such a good fit before you start regularly having people over. But, perhaps is going to take a few weeks of doing it and then him saying it's not a good fit.

Or perhaps he feels like he does need to take every phone call and does need to be at every committee meeting and does need to be at every hospital bedside as he's getting started. And he wants you to cheerfully let him go anytime day or night with no limits. You talk about it and modify that expectation with a conversation but realize that it might take a few weeks or even months for him to find a great balance.

Pray for your husband! Encourage him to speak to other pastors and get their feedback. Be patient with him. Be humble as you engage him on things you disagree with. And be kind if he comes to see perhaps you are right.

While your husband may have a few unrealistic expectations that might need modifying or scrapping completely, there is one expectation (or maybe just a desire) that you want to find out about: what can you do that really cheers your husband on in the ministry.

- This might be you sitting (or wrestling) with your little kids in the pew as he preaches …even though you hear very little of the sermon. Just to have your face there helps him!

- This might be having couples over regularly one night for hospitality so that you all can get to know increasing number of the congregation in a more personal setting.

- And believe it or not, this might be simply having enough energy for sex on Sunday night after his long Sunday is through (bet you didn't see that one coming! But it is highly requested by many pastors!).

Don't just guess at this one. Ask him! And ask him again! It may be something that changes as he pastors. Rarely is the wish list long, which always gives me hope of meeting them. And if for some reason, the thing he would really love for you to do is something you're not sure how you can do it, talk it through and see if you can modify and come up with the best solution possible to encourage him without killing you. The advice of other pastoral couples can help you a lot with this, too.

Mess in the Middle

Overwhelmed with all these expectations? Join the club! With so many people having so many expectations, the ministry can sometimes feel like working in a customer service department on a bad day. Somebody always thinks something is wrong, and no one seems to agree on how to fix it. What might please some people, may displease others. Is the glass really half empty? Where is the gratitude that it is also half full? Some get completely dissatisfied and decide to take their "business" elsewhere

to another church. And of course, there's our husbands and ourselves. Not only do can we get grumpy about everyone else's expectations, but we have our own expectations, too. Ah… the Fall. Ah… sinners. No wonder men must be godly to pastor God's people!

Here are four last thoughts on expectations that I hope will be encouraging to you and your husband:

1. Remember the Good

Caring about what church members think can be right and good. It can be part of us knowing them and learning how best to love them. Church members caring about what our husbands and families are doing can be right and good, too. It is part of us furnishing them with a godly example that may help them grow in the Lord. Caring and watching are attributes of learners and instruments of change. These attitudes can help us keep on seeking out what's best for one another and to build up one another in Christ.

2. Forbear through the Bad

But unfortunately, with us being sinners and all, our care for others is contaminated with selfishness. Many times, we care about what others think because we want them to think well of us. Church members may sometimes desire or expect things from their pastor that aren't healthy. Even pastors may desire the wrong things or respond in the wrong ways to church members.

As God's people who are new creations yet carry around sinful hearts, were going to experience both. All we can do is have humility, confess our sin to God, and ask Him to help us love each other better. The great news is that the same God who calls our husbands to shepherd His people, shepherds us. He is more than sufficient to give us His heart of patience, forbearance and love.

3. Work for Change

Our husbands get to shepherd the church, themselves, and their families away from inappropriate expectations and lead them towards biblical ones. We get to support our husbands through our encouragement, prayers and long-suffering love. Sometimes the changes come through conversations ("I'm so sorry I can't lead a discipleship group like the previous pastor's wife did. My husband needs me to be more available in the evenings for our family. By helping him, it frees him up to pastor you better." etc.). But many times, changes in expectations seep in almost unnoticed through the preaching of His Word and prayers of God's people as they gather together. As we grow up into Christ, our head, we grow together in our desires.

4. Look to God and Take Hope

But most of all, look to God and take hope. He who calls us is faithful. Oh, so faithful to give us all that we need. We are His people. He had the power to save us, though we be dead in our sins. He has the power to change us, too. He can bring encouragement when we dash expectations and strength to persevere, nonetheless. He can give wisdom to form good expectations and grace to help us meet them. He can give us courage to confront inappropriate expectations and kindness as we respond to them. He can give us love for one another as we work through all these expectations. And He can help renew our hearts and our minds so that our expectations line up increasingly with His. In the end, we all live for an Audience of One. It is Him we desire to please and it is only Him who can make us able to fulfill His expectations:

"For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, with joy..." (Colossians 1:9-11)

From Section 2: Looking to God for All We Need

"Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord,
'You are my Lord; apart from you, I have no good thing.'" Psalm 16:1-2

God Is the Best Thing

"Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from you, I have no good thing." Psalm 16:1-2

Look at that last phrase: "Apart from you, I have no good thing." No good thing. Nothing. Nada.

Perhaps this one phrase best sums up why God called David a man after His own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). David loved God. David knew God. He found satisfaction only in God. He knew the help he needed would only come from God. For David, there was simply no life without God because God was the Source of All Good, and the greatest Good, Himself. We don't know which of the many difficult events in David's life gave rise to this psalm, but it was something that David knew no other helper would do but God. David takes captive the fears of his heart and the danger of the circumstances with reminders of who God is, what He has done, and what He promises to do.

If I could ask for any verse to be the banner over my life and the beat of my heart, it would be this verse. To seek God because He is not only the source of every good thing, but because He, Himself, IS the best good thing. To live a life that daily declares the goodness of God, in all that He does, in all that He plans, regardless of how mysterious or difficult what He chooses might appear. To be content fully in Him and desire to be fully obedient to Him. And, that even if everything that I hold dear (and see as good) is stripped from me, that I would still stand firm in the goodness of the Lord. To this end, I pray for myself and others.

To this end I strive to live, as God gives grace. And it is only by grace – God's unmerited gift to us. Because THIS kind of heart, THIS kind of life is the work of the Lord that we call sanctification: being transformed into the likeness of Jesus. And as far as I've ever observed, it takes a lifetime to God's grace to grow it within us. And it will never fully bloom until heaven, when God takes us, His imperfect, sinful people, and changes us completely to be like His Son in the twinkling of an eye. What a day that will be!

What I Need Most, What Ministry Needs Most
This seeking after God is more than simply a prayer for me to grow, personally, for my own good. If 40+ years in the ministry has taught me anything, it is that seeking after God is the lifeblood of being in the ministry and staying in the ministry. It is how God equips us, sustains us, and binds us together in unity with Him, with our husbands, and with God's people. Apart from God, there is no good thing. Period.

Every day in ministry is another day of the Devers' learning this. But we are far from alone. We stand on far greater shoulders of the godly pastors and wives in the past. Ray Rhodes, Jr. author of Yours Til Heaven, a biography about the Spurgeons wrote this: "To know God as He is revealed in the Bible and to walk closely with Him was the essence of Charles and Susie's spirituality. A desire to know and follow God motivated them in the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, family and congregational worship, and meditation on Scripture. True spirituality was a matter of joyful obedience and the necessary glue that cemented the Spurgeons' love and hopeful outlook even when the high waves of controversy, sickness, and loss crashed heavily upon them." –regarding pastor Charles Spurgeon and his wife, Susannah. (p.43)

The Spurgeons learned this, the Devers are still learning this, and I can promise you, that if you are in the ministry, you have or will be learning this, too. That only through God, can weak, sinful people like our husbands shepherd their families and God's people as He calls them to. And only through God, can we, their weak, sinful wives, support our husbands and live and love our families and God's people happily alongside them.

And this is why I cannot imagine doing a series of talks for pastors' wives without a look at seeking after God and how to grow in godliness. That's like trying to travel to a distant city without a roadmap in a car without an engine.

In this section, I'd like to:

- Remind you of how we seek God;
- Encourage you with 10 ways God uses your seeking Him to bear good fruit, especially as a pastor's wife.
- Think about why seeking God builds the unity you and your husband need in the ministry
- Look at how God grows us as we seek Him
- Offer 10 ways to help you seek the Lord while in the ministry

From Section 2: Looking to God for All We Need

"Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord,
'You are my Lord; apart from you, I have no good thing.'" Psalm 16:1-2

How We Seek After God: The Three Food Groups

You've no doubt heard of the four food groups that nourish our bodies: fruits and vegetables, grains, dairy, meats and proteins. If you are mothers, you probably spend your life in these, making sure your kids get some of all these with (most) every meal, or talking yourself into counting the pickles on your kids' fast food chicken sandwich on those days when you just don't have the energy to snap those green beans, like I have from time to time. Why do we have that running checklist in our heads? Why do we rationalize pickles on chicken sandwiches? Because we know that food is the building blocks of our kids' health. We want to build well so they can live well.

But now, I'd like to think about the three food groups that nourish our relationship with God. so we know Him better and grow to be like Him: God's Word, God Himself (His Spirit and by Prayer) and God's People. Let's look at each.

1. We Seek Him Through the Bible, His Word
God's Word is frequently pictured as the spiritual food for our hearts and is even more important than the physical food that keeps our bodies alive:

> "He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD." (Deuteronomy 8:3)

These are the very words that a very hungry Jesus used against Satan's temptation to cut short the fast His Father had allowed by making bread with supernatural power. Knowing God's Word that we might obey Him even trumped severe hunger pangs.

We feed on the food of God's Word as we:
- Read God's Word daily (Deuteronomy 17:17-20);
- Meditate on it day and night (Joshua 1:8);
- Study it with another person (Acts 8:30-32); and,
- Gather together to hear the preaching of God's Word each week (Acts 13:14).

Daily… day and night… each week… on our own… with a prayer partner… with the whole church… we need to take time in God's Word for it to nourish us. Food doesn't fuel your body unless you ingest it. God's Word is the same. We need to take time to look at what it says, what it means, and how to apply it to our lives. It means praying it and turning it over in our minds and asking God to use it to work in our hearts and in our lives.

And when we do, we find that, indeed, God's Word is unlike any book we will ever read. Not only because it only is the inspired Word of God and we know we can always trust it to tell us what is true about God, His plans and how He wants us to live. But because this is no simple pen, ink and paper book. This is the living Word of God. God's Holy Spirit uses it powerful to grow God's likeness (godliness) in our heart and

our life.

> "For the Word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

"No one is changed by an unread Bible… The first thing the child of God has to do morning by morning is to obtain food for his inner man. Now what is food for the inner man? Not prayer, but the Word of God; and here again, not the simple reading of the Word of God, but considering what we read, pondering over it and applying it to our hearts. (Spiritual Disciplines)

2. We Seek Him through Fellowship with Him, by His Spirit, through Prayer

"I **said** to the LORD." (Psalm 16:2)

Psalm 16, the whole thing, highlights the second of what I call the three, major spiritual food groups: prayer. With 75 psalms attributed to David, it's no wonder that we know more about David's prayers than anyone else's in the Bible. We see David seeking after God in his happiest days and his darkest nights. He brings his needs, his emotions, his fears, his sins, to God. He bursts into songs of praise and thanksgiving. He expresses his righteous angry over God's enemies. He confesses with humility his own sin and asks for forgiveness.

"Prayer is in one sense an expression of a Christian's unbroken relationship with the Father." (Spiritual Disciplines) David's prayers certainly were that. And following David's example, our prayers are meant to be that, too.

The ACTS of Prayer
Prayer is so much more than just God for what we need. I've often found the classic "ACTS" acronym helpful for my prayers:

A: Adoration Praising God for who He is.
C: Confession Telling God our sins and asking His forgiveness and His help to repent.
T: Thanksgiving: Thanking God for Jesus and for all of His other good gifts.
S: Supplication: Asking God to act in us and around the world for our good and His glory.

These full-bodied meditations help me get my head out of the fog and gaze up at who God is: so holy, so powerful, so wise, so good! They help me take humble look at myself and see the sin that clings to my heart and life. They help me remember what God has done already and be grateful. They round out and even correct my short-sighted, sometimes obsessive, focus on the day's immediate concerns with God's bigger perspective and God's bigger plans.

And the funny thing is that often if I dwell on the A,C, and T. first, God has many times already crossed off my many of my "S" requests, having used those first meditations to give me the very wisdom, peace, contentment, joy, etc. that I was needing to ask Him for. Because as much as I needed those specific "things", in looking at Him first, I find what I need in Him. And it makes me want to go back to "T" again and spend my day thanking Him that "all that I needed His hand has provided, great is His faithfulness!" (excerpt from Great Is Thy Faithfulness, William M. Runyan)

> "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever… it is good for me to draw near to God." -- Psalm 73:25-26, 28

God nourishes our relationship with Him as we:

- Pray regularly (Matthew 6:11, Psalm 55:17)
- Pray continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- Pray for each other (Acts 1:4; Acts 2:42)
- Pray on our own (Matthew 6:6)
- Pray with a few others (Matthew 18:20)
- Pray as a church (Acts 12:5)
- Pray for the church (Acts 6:24)
- Pray for our enemies (Matthew 5:44)
- Pray for the gospel to be taken to the world (Matthew 9:38)

In times of trouble, one friend used to regularly say to me, "Jesus is alive!" Sounds basic, but sometimes I go around acting like Jesus is my imaginary friend. The world around us certainly thinks that. But oh, my friend was right! Our God is God! He rules over all! His plans are unstoppable! Everything we read about Him in the Bible really are true. Sometimes I just have to stop and remind myself this. When I pray, I am not just speaking into empty space as a therapy crutch! I am speaking to the LORD, the great "I Am Who I Am."

And listen to what this "Great I Am" promises His people:
To be near them: "The Lord is near to all who call on him." (Psalm 145:18).
And to answer them: "I sought the Lord, and he answered me." (Psalm 34:4)

"God not only has spoken clearly and powerfully to us through Christ and the Scriptures, He also has a Very Large Ear continuously open to us. He will hear every prayer of His children, even when our prayers are weaker than a snowflake. (Spiritual Disciplines)"

Don't let the constant accessibility we have to God stop you from appreciating the immense privilege God has given us through Jesus. (Ephesians 2:18) The God of the entire universe desires to know us! And because He desires to know us, we can have confidence that as we seek Him, we will find Him. And as we find Him, He will act. He will help us to know and enjoy Him more. He will change us to be more like His Son. And He will make His delight to be the joy of our heart and the beat of our life.

3. We Seek Him as We Fellowship with His People

> "I say of the holy people who are in the land, "They are the noble ones in whom is all my delight. Those who run after other gods will suffer more and more. I will not pour out libations of blood to such gods or take up their names on my lips." --Psalm 16:3-4

No wonder David delighted in God's people more than any other people. Like him, they sought the Lord. They desired to know and obey Him. When tempted with the world's way, when burdened with trouble, when struggling to keep going, David had people like Abigail, Jonathan, and the prophet Nathan to help him to persevere and act wisely.

But many times, we think of seeking God as mainly a PERSONAL process—a sort of "Jesus and me" thing. But when you look at Scripture, it becomes clear that God sees seeking Him as a PEOPLE process—a body of Christ thing. God didn't just choose INDIVIDUALS for Himself from before the creation of the world. He chose a PEOPLE for Himself. This people, He called the Body of Christ. This people who will be His bride. And in the life to come, we will all live together, a city of people, one with our Savior, one with each other forever. (Revelation 21:10-11)

But before that Day, God intends up to gather together and help one another seek God and grow to be like Jesus. And just like God intended the parts of a body work together, so He intended for believers to be an integral part of us all growing in godliness.

"Consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." --Hebrews 10:24-25 Here are two of my favorite Bible verses that encourage us to seek God, through prayer and His Word:

> "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you." --Philippians 4:4-10
>
> "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." --Colossians 3:15-17

But to whom were these written? You guessed it! CHURCHES – groups of God's people gathering together! In English, perhaps this is more difficult to realize because "you" singular is spelled just like "you" plural. But were you to put on your Greek translation glasses, you would see immediately that most of the verses we take individually, are really to be understood corporately, in the context of God's people committed to loving each other and equipping each other in a local church. That's because God's people are to minister to one another, helping each other grow up in maturity into Christ.

And look at Ephesians 4:

> "[Christ] gave some to be … pastors… to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. --Ephesians 4: 7,11-13, CSB

Pastors are frequently called ministers or said to be called into the ministry; but in the Bible, ministry is actually a word used for all of God's people, not just men who are pastors. Pastors are equippers, but God intended for all of us to be a part of feeding each other the spiritual food we need.
We feed each other God's good food as we:

- Build one another up (Matthew 6:11, Psalm 55:17)
- Pray for one another (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- Speak truth in love to one another (Acts 1:4; Acts 2:42)
- Listen and discuss preaching (Matthew 6:6)
- Confess our sins to one another (James 5:16)

- Share with one another (Galatians 6:2)
- Confront, exhort and rebuke one another (Hebrews 3:13)
- Talk about God to each other as we go through our lives (Colossians 4:6)
- Teach each other how to live out God's Word (Titus 2)
- Sing and praise God together (Colossians 3:16)
- Use the gifts God gives us to serve one another (1 Peter 4:10-11)

God's plans to seek Him and grow us to be more like Jesus as individuals is inextricably connected to the local church. We need to not only seek to know and be known by God, as individuals, but as His people to grow together as He wants us to grow. Sitting under preaching, speaking in the hallways, discussing books, singing hymns, praying for one another, sharing over a phone call, living life out with each other and in front of each other, using the special gifts God gives us, using the ordinary gifts God gives us, God using our strengths and most definitely our weaknesses to encourage and build one another up. Growing up into Christ is a group project for God's people! We are to feed each other!

"The most powerful ongoing Christian witness has always been the speaking of God's Word by one who is living God's Word (Spiritual Disciplines)."

Food Groups Casserole

Now I know I've presented these three food groups as if they were being served on one of those paper plates with dividers that keep different food separate. But the truth is, it is almost impossible to keep these foods apart. They work together more like a spiritual casserole than individual dishes. God's people are constantly using God's Word and praying to grow.

And, just like there are cookbooks filled with casserole recipes, combining different foods for different flavors, so it is with God's people, God's Word and prayer. Your personal devotion times may be one combination, while you're gathering together in your church's worship service may be another. There are times when you will be preaching God's Word to yourself or to a friend. There will be times when you read a sermon or sing a hymn. The possibilities are endless. The promise of growth is great. Just keep on eating! This is one place where you can't become overweight from too much eating!

Questions for You

1. How do you choose what to study in the Bible? Is there any certain tool or structure that has especially helped you to seek God in your times in the Word?

2. Have you ever used the ACTS prayer acronym to guide your prayer time? If so, how has this been helpful to you?

3. Have you thought about fellowship with God's people being an important way that we seek God? Share an experience of how God's people have helped you seek God and grow closer to Him.

4. How have you seen the "food group casserole" at work? How has your time in God's Word, with Him in prayer, and your time with God's people worked together to help you seek God and grow in godliness?

From Section 2: Finding All We Need in God

"Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord,
'You are my Lord; apart from you, I have no good thing.'" Psalm 16:1-2

How God Grows Us As We Seek Him

God Grows Us Slowly
"With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day."-- 2 Peter 3:8 And sometimes it feels just like that. We ask and seek for God to work, but change comes so slowly.

Think Stalactites, Not Instant Potatoes
God's Word; God, Himself; God's people. Three very powerful ways for us to grow in godliness and to grow up into our head, Jesus Christ. These have been the same three sources of good food that God has continued to use to help me grow in godliness. But being on this "diet" of good food, did not work instant results in godliness. My former love of my own way and my own understanding wasn't just a pile of trash that I put out for the collector to come take away on bulk trash day. Picked up once and gone forever. Replaced by the shiny, new, good godliness.

No. My sin issues, was much more like the dandelions my stepdad tried to rid our backyard of. They thrived on an extensive root system that lay invisibly underground, ready to sprout up again and again. I might tear out one flower, even by its roots, but another little yellow head was sure to pop up somewhere else.

Why couldn't I just DO what I was supposed to do! Why couldn't I just BE what God wanted me to be? Was I really a Christian? Did I need to ask God to save me (yet again)? Why couldn't godliness "stick" and stay "stuck"? That's really what the last 40 years or so have been about. Learning that while the Lord loves to save us in an instant, He loves to grow us in godliness (that is, sanctify us) over a lifetime… and finish it off in "Gloryland" with Him.

And while it is "bad news" that godliness isn't grown instantly, it is "good news" to understand what to look for; and that what we long for is promised. ""Conformed" and "renewed" are the other two verbs of process frequently used to described how God grows godliness in His people. Another one is "transformed", that Paul uses here in 2 Corinthians 3:18:

> "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

"Transformed, one degree of glory to another" These are all verbs of change… just not instant change. They are verbs of process, and process requires time and perseverance. "Are being" that means it is happening and we can count on it. So, the reality that we are not what we were, yet we are not what we want to be, is not a mistake but part of God's plan. The truth is, the Lord loves to grow things. Just look around you and you can see in everywhere. Not just in us, but in nature, too. It's the same thing. God loves to grow things. He could have made giant sequoia sampling in such a way as to grow its 250 feet overnight. But instead, He chose for it to take 500 to 750 years to finish growing.

It's the same thing with God's people. He sprouts us through His Holy Spirit, then He chooses to change us through a growth process. This can feel really frustrating, if you want instant change. But it's really encouraging, if you're discouraged with how slowly you are growing in godliness. It may be going slowly, but it may be going exactly how it's supposed to go. 70 or 80 years feel like such a long time to grow. You might wish you were a gadfly who goes through the whole process of life in a day. But God knows just what he's doing, and just be glad you're not a giant Sequoia!

God Has Woven Our Growth into His Plans

Donald Whitney in his book, Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life, cites three catalysts that God uses to grow godliness in His people: people, circumstances and spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are eating and absorbing the good food of we talked about already. These we can plan into our schedules in a deliberate way, hence the word "discipline." And the other two—people and circumstances—those are much more rogue factors from our perspective. They are what we call "life."

As God's Word says, James 4:14-15: "

> You do not even know what will happen tomorrow! What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord is willing, we will live and do this or that."

But while the pages of our life are not frequently opened to us ahead of time, they are not only laid open before the Lord, but planned out. And not only planned out, but planned out for our good and God's glory. And that means that we can have confidence that God truly is able to fulfill His promise to make us godly, using the very means of all of the people and circumstances of our lives.

As Paul says,

> "We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified. -- Romans 8:28-30

"All things work" because it is God who calls. "All things work" because it is God who planned. "All things work" because He has woven them together to bring about our Christ-likeness and the Christ-likeness of His people.

Paul Tripp sums up what God calls us to do in light of what He has planned: "I do not write my own story, it has been written for me. My job is to live inside of the plot that God has written for me in the way that I have been called by him to live."

Everything We Face in Life Is Really God Making Another Ring on the Tree

If indeed this is true, do you realize how that turns everything in our lives as a catalyst to seek God and grow to be more like Jesus Back to the giant sequoia analogy… because everything we go through comes through the sovereign, wise, loving hands of God, we can know that He will use it to make another "ring" of godliness on our little tree. Every person, every circumstance, it is ALWAYS growing season with our God. Nothing wasted. Nothing left undone. It might not feel good. I might prefer to not experience it. I might look forward to when these days are done. But God is up to good! He is forming me!

James 1:2-4:

> "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you fall into various temptations, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. Let endurance have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

And what does he say comes from endurance? Being made perfect and complete lacking in nothing. Many trials to produce much fruit. Fruit usually takes time to go from flower to ripe.

My experience with godliness is a big "Amen" to this truth! Godliness has been a matter of slowly-but-surely growth. It has been a lifetime in the making as God expands the circumstances in which like David I cry, "Apart from you I have no good thing."

So yes, when I became a Christian, I confessed God as the King of the universe and of my life. Yes, I turned away from living life my own way and turned to Jesus to be my Savior then. Yes, I knew God's forgiveness and enjoyed the Holy Spirit's work in my heart at that time. I could tell you that God alone is good and His plans are perfect. I could tell you that He is the most wonderful person we can ever know, and God's Word is powerful and living and able to work wonders in us.

I knew godliness was important. I knew we were to desire it. But while those first expressions were heart felt, as life's difficulties came, my godliness—my desire to love what God loves and want what He wants most of all-- reminded me of the morning glory flowers along my back fence. When the sun was out and life was good, I opened my little flower face and boasted and trusted in the radiance of the Son. But come night fall, when life was hard and God's ways felt "unkind" and certainly unfathomable, I wanted to close my little flower face and shut my boastings of His glory.

All these years of being a Christian and I still feel like I am only on the outskirts of godliness in some ways. "Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the one I love. Take my heart, Lord. Take and seal it. Seal it for Thy courts above!" -- Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing

All that I DO know of godliness in my life has been only of the Lord's doing, as he has been slowly transforming me. He has kindly used people and circumstances to bring about His metamorphosis. With each dark day, has come God's faithfulness to sustain my faith, to help me trust Him more, and to help the cry of my heart look more like the cry of David's.

But it has taken a life's worth of clinging to God in times of great weakness to appreciate the power and the sweetness of His love for me and that the best place to be every day (not just on hard days) is dependent upon Him (John 14:5). A life's worth of decisions to see how true His Word is and to choose it over my own way. A life's worth of observation to see that the best this world has to offer is unsatisfying, if it is not from God's hand, and the rich contentment that comes from but little if it is.

A life's worth of God's plans seeming to hijack my best of plans to trust even His most mysterious providences are far better than anything I could even imagine. A life's worth of fighting difficulty to see that it is only in the deep roots of a relationship with God, the promises of His Word, and the prayers and encouragement of His people was the nourishment to endure can be found. And a life's worth of ministry to be the perfect center stage for many of these lessons about godliness and much of the change He has made in my heart.

As much as I wish my experience was unusual and I wish I could tell you to just do a certain three things and you will have instant godliness, it is simply not the case. God loves to grow things. And often very slowly. Slowly, but surely, trial after trial, year after year, God has used both the good days, and even more, those dark days to grow my confidence in Him and His good ways. Even in his perfect (slow) timing.

Understanding this gives us hope and patience, for ourselves, for our husbands, for every church member. We are like the hamburger buns at Fuddruckers: on display from mixing and kneading to shaping and rising to baking. Always somewhere on the path to what God is making us. And there is always something of God's good work that we can see and encourage each other with. Like Paul, we can keep on striving to seek after God, that we might know Him better and He might make us like Jesus.

> "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." --Philippians 3:12-14, ESV

And we strive WITH CONFIDENCE because of His promises to us:

> "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."--Philippians 1:6

From Section 2: Finding All We Need in God

"Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord,
'You are my Lord; apart from you, I have no good thing.'" Psalm 16:1-2

Why We Need to Seek God:
10 Encouragements for Pastors' Wives

It's one thing to KNOW that we should seek God and HOW to seek God, and yet another TO seek God as we should and as we can. We read "Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him." Psalm 34:8. Yet sometimes we act like a kid being forced to eat Brussel sprouts (which most kids do not think taste good at all!). I'd like to turn up your spiritual taste buds by encouraging you with eleven very good reasons for pastors' wives to seek the Lord.

1. As We Seek Him, We Find Him and Eternal Life
God created us to know Him and be in relationship with Him. Everything about our lives is tied in Him. We do not exist without Him. And even though sometimes seeking after God feels so hard and even boring, and we may feel at times to be simply mouthing truths with cold hearts, the truth is, there is no one more wonderful to know than God. There is no one more fascinating than God. There is no one more enjoyable and fulfilling to know than God.

The desire to know God is actually the gift God gives to His people that is a means to a beginning: the beginning of eternal life, as Jesus says:

> "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent." John 17:3 ESV

It starts as He brings us to life by His Holy Spirit at conversion. It continues to grow within us throughout this life and all through the next:

> "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world." John 17:24, ESV

And how glorious it will be to know and enjoy God then! The fact that God is infinite means that there will always be more of God to know and more, even deeper enjoyment to be had.

Think about the sweetest fellowship you've ever had with anyone. That intimacy is nothing compared to knowing God. Like Paul says, we see but in a glass to him lay, but one day, in heaven we will know him face-to-face and we will understand this fully. And there will be nothing boring about that at all! We will spend endless days basking in the reality that no one more wonderful to know than Him. The truest and deepest joy we can know in life is found only in God. Seeking God takes discipline, but it is the source of the only lasting happiness.

I love these two Jonathan Edward's quotes:
In the midst of his ministry:

> "The happiness of the creature consists in rejoicing in God, by which also God is magnified and exalted."

From his death bed:

> "And now God is in this room; I see Him, and oh, how unspeakably lovely and glorious does He appear –worthy of ten thousand thousand hearts, if we had them! He is here, and hears me pleasing with the creatures that He has made, whom He preserves, and loads with blessings…"

Yes, God created us to know Him and enjoy Him forever. And the wonderful thing is that loves to answer our seeking Him with finding:
"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." –Jeremiah 29:13

Encouragement for Pastors' Wives
Every day is a great day to seek after God and enjoy His presence. But, when the trials mount, friends leave, church members continue to misunderstand or be discontent, or we mess up, it is even a BETTER day to remember that nothing will ever separate us from the love of God we have through Christ. He who is best is always there, and will never leave. Whether it's to seek His comfort or to look forward to the day when we will be with Him forever, enjoying Him and a world in which every trouble has vanished, He fills us up with Himself and gives us what we need to carry on.

2. As We Seek Him, He Changes Us to Reflect His Holiness

> "Be holy as I am holy." -- Leviticus 19:2

"Holy", "godliness" . These words may conjure up all sorts of rotten (untrue) stereotypes. Godliness is boring. Godliness is something for elite Christians who want to take their spirituality up a notch (such as pastors and their wives?) Godliness turns people into judgmental, brittle goody-goody's who think of themselves as better than others. Godliness is just a bunch of do's and don'ts and spoils all our fun. Godliness is how we act like on Sundays when we have our best game face on, but has very little to do with our everyday lives. Godliness is forcing yourself to choke down the book of Leviticus in a dry and lifeless quiet time.

But I've come to see that rather than being something ugly, harsh, bloodless, lifeless as the stereotypes might lead you to believe, true godliness is something extremely beautiful. It is a beautiful life that flows out from a beautiful heart, whose source is the MOST beautiful person with the MOST beautiful heart and the MOST beautiful life – – God, Himself.

It is loving what God loves, wanting what He wants, responding to the people and circumstances in our lives as He would. If you want to know what godliness looks like, there is no one better to look to than God and no better place than Scripture to understand what He is like and how He would have us reflect Him. There, He proclaims his character in his descriptions of himself, in the laws he sets up laws and in the promises he makes. There, he shows his character in how he deals with people and works in circumstances.

A deepening knowledge of God is not just a fulfilling relationship, but a fruitful one. We cannot help but be changed to be more like God as we grow nearer to Him in godliness. That's what the word godliness implies: reflecting the character of God. Godliness is us reflecting God, up to Him, out to others, and inward to our own hearts. It is loving what He loves, wanting what He wants, responding to the people and circumstances in our lives as He would. If you want to know what godliness looks like, there is no one better to look to than God, and no better place to look than Scripture to understand what He is like and how He would have us reflect Him. There, He proclaims his character in his descriptions of himself, in the laws he sets up laws and in the promises he makes. There, he shows his character in how he deals with people and works in circumstances. And most of all, there He shows Himself to us through Jesus, His perfect life lived and given to bring sinners to God.

As we seek God, He grows us into the likeness of His Son

> "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." 2 Corinthians 3:18

He makes us like the moon which reflects the sun rays even in this dark world. "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." Matthew 5:16

Encouragement for Pastors' Wives

The qualifications to be an elder/pastor/overseer include furnishing a godly example in how they live and in how they lead their local church. Pray that God would not only use his study of God's Word to preach well, but to continue to be transformed into the likeness of the Savior. Seek God, yourself, asking Him to make you a godly reflection alongside your husband, as a woman, a wife, a mother, and a member of your local church. NOT as a model of perfection, but a model of a humble woman being faithful do good to her husband, her kids, her church, and her God with her whole life. In this way, your life actually amplifies your husband's example. And we've found this to be such a great encouragement to others in the church, particularly those who were not raised in Christian homes.

3. As We Seek Him, We Learn to Depend on Him and Bear His Fruit

Ever since our first parents rebelled in the Garden, we humans have made independence our Plan A for life. But that Plan A self-reliance is just a fancy way of saying sinful rebellion when it comes to our relationship with God. We want to get things our own way, for our own purposes, for the glory of our own name. And the Plan B life of dependence upon Him, is actually exactly what God designed us for. We were made to survive and thrive through our fellowship with God.

Paul Miller, in his book The Praying Life, calls Jesus was the most dependent person to live. Miller reflects that dependence was no hardship for Jesus. This was right where He wanted to be and knew He was meant to be both as a human like us, and as the Son of God, living in complete, contented submission to the Father. And in being the most God-dependent person to ever live, Jesus was also the most God-trusting person to ever live. Dependence and trust go hand in hand. And where there is dependence and trust, there is perfect unity, perfect fellowship, perfect wonderfulness This was ETERNAL LIFE. Jesus knew that, lived that, and loved that.

In heaven, our dependence and trust upon God will be perfect like Jesus'. Our desire will be in perfect submission to God's and our fellowship with Him will be perfect, too. We will be one at last, and Jesus' prayer for us answered.

But we are not there, not yet. Our sin still seeks self-reliance. We love independence. We distrust relying on someone else, even when that someone else is Almighty God. And no surprise that our fellowship with Him is not like that which Jesus enjoyed. That is why it is so important for us to seek the Lord, as we pray, read His Word, and be encouraged by God's people. This is how we grow closer in fellowship to God and not enjoy Him more but be better able to do what He calls us to do.

> "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6"If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.… John 15: 4-6

Listen to that: it's the ones NOT abiding who get cast into the fire!

Encouragement for Pastors' Wives

If ministry is the life we are called to alongside our husbands, then dependence upon God is the air we need to breathe to live that life. When we are close to the Lord, we are far more likely to love better, live better, and counsel better. God can help us bear much fruit when we abide in Him. And not just any fruit, but the fruit of the Spirit that will help us respond like Him even in ministry hardship: extending forgiveness instead of bitterness. Showing love and kindness instead of vengefulness. Softening boldness with gentleness. Continuing in patient endurance in suffering. Bearing the fruit of joy in seemingly impossible circumstances, and the rare gift of self-control when tempted to sin.

But God doesn't stop there. Suddenly, Paul's language about fellowship of Christ's suffering makes sense. God's grace sufficient as His power is made perfect in our weakness. That's why Paul says when he is weak, that he is strong. Suffering is God's servant to draw us to Him and abide in Him. This is why Paul rejoiced in his weakness. Because God is always faithful, the hardships that force us to depend upon Him bear fruit themselves. Every hardship we have faced echoes this truth. There has never been a single time, in either our personal lives or in ministry to God's people in our local church, where God has not wasted a sorrow. He truly does work everything for our good and His glory. He truly uses each one to transform us into the likeness of Christ. And THIS redeeming of every trial serves to trust Him more and deepen our fellowship with Him. Amazing!

4. As We Seek God, He Straightens Out Our Tangled Thoughts and Circumstances

There is a way that seems right to man that leads to death. The heart is deceitful above all things. Hope deferred makes the heart sick. Those are just three truths from Scripture that show us why we should not simply "follow our heart" as the world tells us to. Even godly, mature Christians have times when their thoughts and the circumstances of life do not match up with what they thought God would do or should do.

A great example of this is Job, one of the most godly people who have ever lived. He looked at the great trials in his life and could not make sense of them. Neither could any of his counselors. THEY said God brought these difficulties on him as punishment for sin. HE didn't see what the sin was and wanted to bring his case before God to straighten the record. Neither Job nor his counselors had a category for what God was REALLY doing! He actually was allowing Job's suffering because Job was godly. And, here we are, thousands of years later, still learning to persevere through trials and confusing circumstances, trusting God's choices and plans for our good and His glory.

Don Carson has an excellent book on praying Scripture called, Praying with Paul. It has been a huge help to me to school my prayers for myself and others along the lines of Scripture. And at the same time, as my prayers have changed, I have found that God has used these very same truth-based prayers to filter out untruths about God that I have been tempted to believe.

Encouragement for Pastors' Wives

Most of Paul's encouragements are directed to the church. That makes them great things to pray for us, our husbands, and our churches. If you are ever at a loss to know what to pray for someone in your church, turn to Paul's epistles. And be ready to be pleasantly surprised at how praying these types of prayers are not only the kinds of prayers God loves to answer, but how He will use meditations of these verses to grow you.

5. As We Seek Him, We Pray with Confidence Because God Chose to Make Our Prayers a Powerful Part of His Sovereign Plans

Our prayers, whether they are short or long, feel effortless or belabored, are all powerful. Why? Because God has ordained them to be so! He has woven the fulfillment of His great plans for the world into the prayers of His people. They are actually part of the good works that God prepared in advance for His people to do. (Ephesians 2:10) Isn't that amazing! We seek after God, asking him to provide, knowing that he will because He is, by His choice, a prayer-answering God.

I don't know about you, but when I think of good works, I think of, well, get-your-hands-dirty good deeds. Prayer doesn't seem to fit the bill. But God clearly thinks differently from me on this matter. The New Testament alone has hundreds of accounts of God's people praying and commands for them to pray about a great number of different things.

When we seek God, He promises to work powerfully. James 5:16 says: "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." But does this mean that God is a divine vending machine who must dispense certain goods when His people push the right Scripture and prayer buttons? Do they give us power over God? No, but it DOES mean that God has chosen to weave our times with Him into the working out of His will.

We see this throughout the Bible. Did you know that Psalm 119 alone mentions more than one hundred blessings for those who study God's Word! Hebrews 4:12 tells us that God's Word is alive and active as it works in our hearts. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 we learn that God's Word is what equips us for every good work. In Isaiah 55:11, we are told that God's Word never returns void but always accomplishes His purposes. Do you see what this means? As we read God's Word, as we meditate and pray to God about what we read, and as we encourage one another with God's Word, God will be at work.

Understanding that God has ordained to do great things through the prayers of His people can help us to pray more. Perhaps you are in a dry season and prayer is particularly difficult now. Think about how many prayers of yours that God has answered even during this season. If He has ordained to do as much as He has during this dry season, can you imagine what He might have ordained to do if we were to pray more?

Encouragement for Pastors' Wives

We can fight to keep praying, remembering that God promises to powerful work through our prayers. No telling how our prayer-answering God may equip us for today and for the future through our prayers! No telling what ministry opportunities He may bring us or how He may choose to glorify Himself! This can help us to pray on!

We remind our husbands of God's plans to work through His people's prayers when they are discouraged. We can boldly pray for fruit from our husband's ministry, knowing that God has woven the fulfillment of His plans for even their ministry into the prayers of His people. This can encourage both us and our husbands to pray big and pray boldly for God's work through our husbands. Pray for powerful preaching, fruitful evangelism, growing knowledge, obedience and delight in God.

We can gather together, not just to chat, but to pray for each other. God gives His people far more than just a sympathetic ear to offer each other. He gives them to opportunity to intercede powerfully on their behalf, imploring their kind and generous Heavenly Father to care for their needs. God has woven the working out of His plans into the prayers of His people. Let's be a part of that working out! If someone shares their discouragement or needs with you, stop right where you are and take a moment to pray

about it. You will encourage them by your offer to pray, remind them that it is God who is Giver of all good things, as well as be at work already in asking God to work out His good plans in their lives.

And remember who this God is who is at work and promises to answer. He is the God who is all-knowing, all-powerful, all-wise. He can work in outside circumstances and inside hearts. He can rescue us as we pray and He can rescue someone on the other side of the world, as we pray. Your husband is in a difficult meeting with a church member. What can you do to help him? You can pray. You need more helpers to volunteer in Children's Ministry or money to make ends meet? You can pray. You have non-Christian friends sitting in the service, hearing God's Word and the gospel for the first time? You can pray! Some of your church's supported workers overseas are facing visa issues? You can pray.

There is no end to what this wonder-working God can do. Perhaps this is why praying is the only thing the Bible tells us to do without ceasing. There is no place you can't pray and nothing God cannot do, according to His perfect will and timing.

6. As We Seek Him, He Prepares Us for Difficulties that Will Come

Before the Day of Trouble
As we seek after God every day, not just in time of trouble, he prepares us for difficulties that will come. Like the house built on the rock, seeking after God now will be a means he uses to keep us standing through the storm. Weekend prayer warriors who generally pray only when times are tough we'll find themselves to be weakened warriors. If we wait until we are struggling to strengthen our defenses, we will have a much bigger struggle.

That's why Paul and Ephesians 6 causes us to be disciplined and regularly prepare for the inevitable struggles. Ephesians 6:10-18 be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power pull on the full armor of God, so you can take your stand against the devil schemes. Etc. etc.. whether it's difficulties with others or lies or temptations that scheme against us from inside our very heart, seeking after God is the way God intends us to fight, endure, and even overcome through these trials.

In the Day of Trouble
We see in this psalm, David seeking God in a time of trial. Like David, there is nothing like a trial that sends me to my knees to cry out to God for help. Stripped of common graces and other good gifts of God, there seems to be nowhere else to go. God is seen for who he is: the giver of life, the sustain of life, the omnipotent God who can rescue us and redeem any situation that we are in, even when all else looks impossible. just as David said, when we see God, he can be our refuge. That is, not out of the storm, but protected from its fury. Not free from a sailing enemies, perhaps, but save from their harm. He will be our surrounding of strength.

Encouragement for Pastors' Wives
Satan is a smart enemy. He seeks to attack the weakest link…many times, sisters, that may be us! Like David, we need to have God as our refuge. How many times have I had my strongest battles right during Mark's sermon preparation or some other crucial time when it would be especially unhelpful for my husband to be distracted from ministry work! And how many times during troubles with church members (or in other areas of life) have I had to go to God for strength, not just to get through the day, but even the hour or moment, in order to fight off worry or bitterness or even hate.

Some things have been so hard that I simply did not think I could bear it. But God in His kindness always strengthened me for those situations through time with Him in prayer and in His Word. God will do the

same for you. I'm guessing He's done this for you already. God will always give us everything we need to be the wives of men in ministry. But we will not have good things apart from Him. It will only be by depending upon Him.

7. As We Seek God, He Equips Our Husbands to Equip the Church

> "[Christ] gave some to be … pastors… to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. --Ephesians 4: 7,11-13, CSB

Ephesians tells us that our pastor-husbands are Christ's gift to God's people. He gives them to God's people to equip God's people to help each other grow up to spiritual maturity. We have already seen from 1 Timothy 3 that this equipping includes:

- Furnishing a godly example in their personal lives and in how they pastor.
- Nourishing the church, equipping them through God's Word and their Christ-like leadership over God's people, and,
- Flourishing their families through their Christ-like leadership in the home.

But no one can equip unless they have been equipped themselves. There is no example to furnish, no food to nourish, no guide to flourish, unless our husbands, and us as their helpers, are equipped by the Lord. And while this equipping most definitely comes with special gifting, such as an ability to preach, it starts in a far more fundamental place: our growing knowledge and love for God.
If our husbands are to equip God's people to grow up into Christ, they must seek the Lord.

Shepherds Under the Good Shepherd

God often calls his people "sheep" and Himself, their "good shepherd". And what does He call our husbands? His under-shepherds. But what strange choices they are to be under-shepherds. For they are nothing but sheep, too! What an incredible task! For a sheep to take on the role of a shepherd, even just an under-shepherd! You would never see this in nature. That would be a ridiculous idea.

But here we see something not natural, but supernatural. Only the Lord would think up such a plan! And what difficult things our husbands are called to do for the sheep: love them, lead them, teach them, discipline. Protect them from enemies and even protect them from themselves. And no matter how fluffy and innocent they may seem, sheep (at least this kind of sheep) do bite! Only God can make our husbands be the under shepherds He calls them to be. This is why godliness is so needful.

Encouragement for Pastors' Wives

The number one most important thing your husband does for the church is to preach God's Word. Your husband may have attended seminary and learned many great tools to help him understand biblical passages, but it will be the Holy Spirit who gives him the insight into the truth and how to best apply it to his congregation. God knows His Word best, His people best, and the times best. He can give your husband the wisdom and insight He needs to faithfully teach His Word and to powerfully apply it to his congregation's lives. God can use us to help our husbands as they prepare to preach, and at the same time, grow you in godliness, and prepare you for any counsel you are asked to give.

8. As We Seek Him, We Have a Wonderful Opportunity to Undergird Our Husbands' Ministry Throughout the Day

We can support our husbands by praying for God to bless them in their callings to be godly men, husbands, fathers, leaders and as bold proclaimers of the truth…all things that are crucial for our husbands, as elders, to be, according to 1 Timothy and Titus.

In 2 Thessalonians 1, Paul tells us that God has chosen to sustain His people through their prayers for each other. We are closest to our husbands, and best informed of their struggles, strengths, and daily work. We can be some of the very best fighters for them and for the gospel. Sometimes I think this is the most powerful way that I help my husband. Heaven will tell.

Encouragement for Pastors' Wives

Pray the Schedule

I have found it useful to pray for Mark's meetings with church members or other pastoral staff, his personal time of prayer and Bible study, and his sermon prep time. His schedule has been a great "prayer guide" for his daily ministry. Then, at the end of the day, it's been encouraging to me to see how God helped him through his day. And, it's been encouraging to him to know that I've been supporting him with my prayers throughout the day.

Pray the Qualifications

Other times, I direct my prayers to the qualifications for overseers (pastors/elders) Paul lists in 1 Timothy 3: 1-7:

"Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap."

This is a great passage to meditate upon and to pray through for our husbands.

Pray the People: Regular, Deep Influencers

And sometimes, I pray for the people who Mark regularly disciples, works with, and who have input into his life. These are the people he has the most regular and deepest influence, and who have the most regular and deepest influence upon him.

Pray the People: The Care List

Our church has a care list that members who are struggling with great difficulty of some kind, whether it be health, jobs, sin struggles or something else that needs the special care and extra prayer of the pastor-elders and the church. These are frequently the people that the elders spend a high percentage of their time counseling and caring for. They may be the ones whose troubling situation requires great wisdom, difficult, but needed conversations, and other actions that are loving but not easy. They are also the ones who usually occupy the minds and even the time of our pastors the most.

Even if my husband might not have much direct contact with a particular person, his heart is weighed down with care for them. Praying for these people is good for these people as God comes to their aid directly. But it's also good to pray for them and for the pastors counseling them, that God might give them the wisdom and grace to care well for them. And, to entrust their ultimate well-being to God who can do all things.

These four ways of praying for our husbands are helpful by focusing on different aspects of his ministry.

9. As We Seek Him, He Uses Us Our Growth to Encourage Others to Seek God and Live for Him, Too

We also know from 1 Timothy 3 that our pastor-husbands are to furnish a godly example in who they lead and live. Seeking God in Bible study, prayer and the encouragement of God's people, are such important parts of being an example of how God transforms His people into His likeness.

The Example of a Work in Progress

Passages like 2 Corinthians 3:18 (And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.) Remind us that every Christian, this side of heaven, is in a work in progress. That means, that our husband/pastors do not only furnish a godly example by being like Christ, but also by being an example of being transformed to be like Christ.

As we seek God, we are encouraging fellow believers as they see how God HAS worked good in them, but how he we are a work of God in progress around so many other works of progress in our churches. Some of us are further along than others in our spiritual growth in Christ. But we all encourage one another as we seek after God.

There is an old restaurant, largely defunct now, called Fuddruckers that my family used to love. One of the things we loved most was the homemade hamburger buns—both the way they tasted and watching them made. The kitchen in which these buns were made was actually right next to the eating area. Instead of being closed off with regular walls, they used glass so customers could see the buns being made. You could see buns in every stage of their development to complete yummy buns, ready to have a hamburger slapped on them. From flour and yeast and salt and a bowl to the ball of dough, to the risen buns, to the beautifully brown, wonderfully smelling buns coming out of the oven.

Encouragement for Pastors' Wives

We know our husbands are supposed to be examples for the church, and one of the great things we can do for them is to ask God to grow His likeness in them. Our husbands teach not just by how they preach, but also by how they live. And our prayer-answer God can use our prayers for our husbands to continue to grow them for the encouragement of the church.

But what about pastors' wives? Scripture gives us very little particular "qualifications" but we know that a pastor's family is known by the church enough to discern if he does manage his family well. That cannot help but bring us into view as examples as we live under their leadership. But even without specific admonitions for pastors' wives, there are plenty of Bible passages that encourage us to build one another up and to help each other grow. On the basis of these, if nothing else, you will be an example to others in the church. And no matter where you are on the "spiritual maturity meter," you can be a great example to others. That's because the important thing is that you are faithfully pressing on to seek God and to be transformed into the likeness of His Son.

Like it or not, a pastor's wife tends to be a high-profile example to others in the congregation. Ask God to make you an encouragement to others as you seek after Him. You don't have to stand out like a spiritual superstar. And actually, being a plain ole, I am weak but He is strong, and a I am a sinner, but He is my Savior kind of woman is one of the most useful, most encouraging examples there are.

10. As We Seek Him, He Knits Us Together with Other Believers

What did Jesus pray for us in the Garden of Gethsemane right before He was crucified? That we would be one:

> "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. "--John 17:20-23

He wants us to have complete unity, why?

- To enjoy fellowship akin to what the Son and the Father enjoy (v.21)
- That the world may believe the Father sent Jesus.
- That the world might know that Jesus loved His people as God the Father has loved Jesus. (vs. 21-23)

The reasons can't get bigger than these!

And no wonder we need Jesus to pray this for us! We are all sinners, and there is every reason in the world for us to disagree with each other in our homes and in our churches.

We are male and female. We are old and young. We are introverts and extroverts. We may be experienced in some things, but we are always only learners in others. We come from different educational, cultural, and racial backgrounds. And most of all, we are all fallible, finite and sinful.

Yes, there is every reason in the world for us to live in disunity, and that is why it is such a God-glorifying thing for us to live in unity. The only unity the world knows is when everyone agrees with me. But the unity God's people can exhibit comes from God being our Lord and from us living in a way that shows that without God we have no good thing. We would rather set aside our own desires and preferences than live apart from God's will.

This unity is a tiny reflection of the fellowship of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three Persons, one God, three Persons working together to fulfill one will. And because God is purely holy and loving, the fellowship this unity brings in nothing short of Perfect Wonderfulness. God's plans for His people began and will end with us enjoying that Perfect Wonderfulness. Adam and Eve knew it with God and with each other before they rebelled. When Jesus brings the new heaven and earth, sin and death will be gone and we be enfolded into that Perfect Wonderfulness, all of God's people united as one, enjoying Him and each other perfectly and forever. Come, Lord Jesus, come!

That sounds wonderful, but how, can this be possible? We all know those passions that war within us and cause us to clash with our spouses and our fellow church members? Sometimes it seems impossible for Jesus' prayer for us to ever be answered. How can we ever "keep in step with the Spirit?" (Galatians 5:25) as God means us to so we can be who God wants us to be?

But this is why when God's people set aside their own personal desires and work together for God's will to be done, is such a powerful testimony to the Living God they love. Who but Him could do this impossible feat in this broken world of self-focused sinners! And by what means will He do this? By God working in us as we seek after Him. His Spirit transforming us as we pray to Him, as we study His Word, and as we encourage one another as God's people—the three "food groups" of seeking God.

Jesus wasn't the only one who had the unity of God's people on His heart. If there is one topic you can count on Paul covering in every letter he wrote to a church, it is the matter of unity.
In Philippians 2:1-8, Paul encourages the church at Philippi towards unity by following Christ's example of choosing what pleases God and what is in the best interest of the other, fellow believers:

> "So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

There is only one way for us to be who God calls us to be: God must grow us into unity under his Son. We have to recognize the desires that war within us, in humility turn away from them, and with the grace God provides to submit ourselves to God, joining together to choose God's will over our own warring desires.

We've seen that this was the desire of David's heart:

> "You are my Lord." David prayed in Psalm 16:2. – – My master. The one I belong to. The one I live to serve. "

And this was the desire of Jesus' heart: "Not my will but your will," Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane—You, God, are the one whose will I choose to obey even if it's not what I want. Even if it's not what I think I want, because you know best.

But how can our hearts be more like David's and Jesus'? And how can people like us ever have hearts like God grow hearts full of warring desires into hearts that desire God's will most of all? It has to be God's work! The good news is, as James says

> "[God] yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us…he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." James 5:7-8

God is jealous for our hearts; that is, He wants us to love Him most of all. And in humility, as we confess our warring desires to Him, we can count on Him to give us grace to keep fighting. God wants to do this work in us and we know that He is able. He has already called us, chosen us, saved us, filled us with His Spirit, and it's His promise to keep on transforming us until the day He takes us home and completes his work in us. No wonder Jesus prayed for our unity! What a great reassurance that God will bring it about! Philippians 2 tells us that every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. What a wonderful day that will be!

But saying that Jesus is absolutely going to answer his prayers to bring us into unity, does not mean it's a snap-your-fingers kind of transformation. Actually, it's almost always a gradual process, and seeking God in prayer, with His Word, and for His people is a crucial part of how it happens. Through prayer, God transforms us and gives us grace to love one another as He desires. Through studying His Word, God unifies our thoughts about who He is and how He wants us to live. And as we seek God together, as a congregation, we pray together for the same good work to be done among us and He uses that to knit our hearts together.

Encouragement For Pastors' Wives

This is another reason why seeking after God is so important for us, as pastors' wives. We can help our husbands equip God's people to grow up into Christ, when we seek the Lord. "Make us one, as You are one with Christ!" is one of the most important requests we can pour before God. Ask God to help you both respond well to difficult situations in the church. Ask God to help your husband and you to fight against unity-breakers, like gossip, envy and unforgiveness. Unity can crumble in times of trials in the church; or, it can be strengthened as it fights against sin and responds with truth spoken in love. If I pray nothing else for our church and my husband every day, it needs to be a prayer to make us one, as Jesus prayed.

This side of heaven, there will continue to be a war of desires inside each of God's people. The new creation part of us longs for us to live in allegiance to God. But the old side of us still rebels. We fight within ourselves, and we fight with one another. Only by seeking God will through prayer, His Word and the help of God's people, will your husband be able to lead the local church towards the kind of love and unity God desires. Paul points to all three of these in his letter to the church in Colossae:

> "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." --Colossians 3:14-16

There have been times when my heart cannot seem to release bitterness, resentment, or unforgiveness towards others who have mistreated, misunderstood or maligned me, my husband, my family or our church. Like an invasive weed, the vines from these sinful attitudes entrap my heart and it feels like they will never let go. I have found that at times like these, the only power strong enough to free my heart is seeking the Lord. Only He can give me courage to speak truth in love when needed. Only He can help me to stop keeping a record of wrongs and forgive.

And even with His help, it is usually an over-and-over-and-over pattern of prayer I need. But God has always been faithful to answer, and in the process, He also seems to grow me to be quicker to forgive in the future. Go to Him with your heart's struggles against the members of your church. Ask Him to answer His prayers to make His people one by helping you forgive and keep on loving.

Questions for You

1. Have you ever done any of these 10 tips? How have they helped you? How has God used them to help your husband and/or the church?

2. Every season of life provides its own set of benefits and difficulties when it comes to seeking the Lord. What season are you in? What are the benefits and difficulties? How can you navigate those to best seek God and to best support your husband's ministry, as you seek God?

3. Any other ideas for how to weave supporting your husband's ministry into your seeking of the Lord?

From Section 2: Finding All We Need in God

"Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord,
'You are my Lord; apart from you, I have no good thing.'" Psalm 16:1-2

Seeking God Makes
Flourishing Our Family in the Ministry Possible

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,
and the two shall become one flesh." --Ephesians 5:31

Let's take a look at Titus 1:6-9:

> "An elder must be blameless, the husband of one wife, with faithful[c] children who are not accused of wildness or rebellion. As an overseer of God's household, he must be blameless, not arrogant, not hot-tempered, not an excessive drinker, not a bully, not greedy for money, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled, holding to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it."

There's a little word "blameless" in verse 6 and then again in verse 7 that makes something quite clear: godliness is a pre-requisite for their job. And, while we've already established that blameless does NOT mean perfect—that would only be Jesus—it does mean a consistent pattern that is seen and acknowledged by others. And where should these men found to blameless? In family, in life, in their biblical leadership.

They are to FLOURISH their families through their loving, wise leadership
while at the same time, they FURNISH a godly example and NOURISH the church.

No wonder Paul says in 1 Timothy 3 "If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble work." This indeed is a noble task; that is, a task beyond and above. For while every Christian man is called to this kind of godliness in these very common Christian life attributes, men like our husbands who either are or who are aspiring to be a pastor/elder, are to be those who are seen to be models of these.

And doesn't this make sense? First of all, good leadership in the smaller scale of a family provides a hopeful indication of the ability to provide good leadership in the larger scale of the church. But also, leadership in the family provides a wonderful model to the rest of the congregation. Our husbands teach through how they lead and preach; but they also teach through their lives, including their family lives.

After all, every Christian husband is to love his wife like Christ loves the church and to raise his children in "the fear and admonition of the Lord." Every wife is to submit to his wise leadership and to do him good by helping him carry out those good decisions within the family. Our husbands, by caring well for us, cannot help but be someone who others in the church will look to as an example. Scripture gives them this model:

> "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you." –Philippians 4:9

Where You Lead, Will I Follow?

You probably figured this out already, all of this has big implications for us, too. God gives our husbands His Spirit to be their Helper, but He gives them a very special earthly helper, too. Who is it? You got it… it's me and you! Our husbands are called to a "noble task" (1 Timothy 3:1) and so God gives them a wife of noble character to help them, not unlike the Proverbs 31 woman who is described as such (Proverbs 31:10, CSB).

Heard that phrase used to describe a biblical woman before? Yes, you have. That amazing Proverbs 31 wife. (Insert an "uh oh" here) But please don't freak out! I'm not about to launch into how you can DO everything that proverbial woman is described as doing to be your husband's helper. Actually, I'm really only pointing to what that woman is said to BE in her heart. It's the motives behind what she does that I'm talking about: that she fears the Lord (v.30), and that she seeks to do her husband good (v.12). Everything else in that passage are only examples that flow out of her love for God and her love for her husband.

THIS is the kind of heart behind the helpers God wants us to be to our husbands as they nourish the church, furnish a godly example, and flourish their families at the same time. Seeking God and growing in godliness is as important for what God calls us to do as it is to what He calls our husbands to do.

The Elephant in the Room

Ok, let's talk about it. Is it hard for you to think about your life's goal is to do good to your husband? Why doesn't Proverbs 31 talk about what HE'S supposed to do for you?!

Does the six-letter word "submit" in Ephesians 5:22-24 feel like a nasty four-letter word to you?

> "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands." --Ephesians 5:22-24

If you struggle here, you may be helped by reading on to verses 25-30:

> "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." -- Ephesians 5:25-40

God is not calling us as wives to submit to abusive tyrants whose every selfish whim we are to meet. God is calling us to submit to men who are to spend their lives loving us sacrificially, cherishing us and building us up in Christ. Our submission, as verse 32 puts it, is to show respect for our husbands' loving work towards us.

And if we look back at verse 21, we see the ultimate reason for our husbands' loving leading and our respectful submission: to show reverence to Christ. Both of us are submitting to Him by living with each other this way.

Show Grace to One Another

Our husbands may need lots of grace to lead in our home and in church, but we need lots of grace to respond to their leadership in a godly manner, too. We both need to show grace to each other. Most every day! Our sin, our inexperience, our personalities, and our pasts, present, and future, will mean that they lead us and we follow them imperfectly. We need to ask God for patience and forgiveness as much as the air we breathe. And we need to make honesty and encouragement the twin engines that help our husbands lead and help us submit in a way that glorifies God.

And lest you think submitting is a position of weakness, oh contraire! According to God's Word, our response to our leadership at home is an indication of the effectiveness of their leadership more broadly. We make a huge difference in if our husbands can be qualified and can stay qualified to be a pastor/elder. And, we are in a special position of impact upon the congregation as others look at us as an example of how God wants families to live. Sobering, but exciting

Questions for You

1. What makes flourishing the family while nourishing the church so hard?

2. How has your husband's leadership in the family helped him as he has led your church?

3. How have your seen your husband improve in flourish your family?

4. How have you learned to show grace towards your husband as he leads you and your family?

5. Have you learned any ways to help learn how to better lead you without discouraging him?

6. Have you ever struggled with making your husband's good your aim? How has fearing the LORD helped you do this?

7. Have you ever struggled with feeling that submission is a position of weakness or less importance?

Shall We Dance?

This two into one thing truly is miraculous work that God does in a Christian husband and wife. And to use yet another analogy, it is quite a bit like a clumsy couple learning to dance together. No, not the individualistic, arm-flailing, head-knocking, hiney-shaking that many couples do today, as fun as that might be. No particular coordination between dance partners is needed in that kind of "everyone does their own thing" moves.

No, I'm talking about ballroom dancing, such as waltzing. Two people trying to do something graceful together to music not of their own making. I should know. Mark and I have actually experienced both---the clumsy couple on the physical ballroom dance floor, bumping into couples, stepping on each other's feet and trying to do some semblance of a rotating box step to the orchestra's peppy waltz music.

But far trickier than our waltzing attempts in college, were the bumps of marriage were hit in the early days of our marriage. (How is it that you can get to know someone over several years before getting married and somehow find that he/she seems to be a stranger when you are married?) Perhaps Mark and I had more shocks than the average couple, or perhaps it just felt that way. There were times when it seemed close to impossible for our two, very different selves to be one. There were so many differences in perspective, in habits, in preferences that I never imagined.

But there was one thing that was NOT different. One thing that pulled us through even the hardest, most discouraging days: the God we each knew and loved. We served the same Shepherd. We had the same Holy Spirit living in us. We believed His Word to be true; His ways to be good. His power to be even

infinite enough for our overwhelming struggles. We read His Word. We prayed (alone and together). We sought counsel. And God taught us and grew us through those days. By His work, two were very much becoming one. He brought the unity we increasingly enjoyed. Where would we have been without the Lord in the middle of our mess and our hearts? I shudder to think.

Leaving Behind the "Push-Me, Pull-You"

If left to our own desires, we would have been like Dr. Doolittle's Push-Me, Pull-You, a llama-looking creatures with a head on each end. With two heads, each pointed in the opposite direction, there's always a tussle. One head desires to go one way, while the other desires to go the other. No one wants to feel like a tail-end. Everyone wants their way. Life is a constant tug of war and whoever has the most "umph" wins by dragging the other against their will.

"Choose your spouse carefully. See that you can make decisions together. The number one thing you will do in your marriage is that: making decisions together." These were the wise and frankly, surprising advice that a godly man gave to those of us attending the Courtship and Marriage class at our church many years ago. There are many things people might think of that top the compatibility charts for couples: personality type, hobbies, number of children desired, career pursuits, etc., but I have to say that I think that teacher got it right: the number one thing we do with our spouse IS make decisions. If you can make good decisions together, everything else is gravy…maybe gravy with lumps, but nonetheless gravy. And where does the foundation come from to make good decisions? You guessed it: our love of God and the desire to live out His Word. Yup. Godliness.

Godliness, making God and what He wants the top priority in our marriage, transforms us, be it little bit by little bit, from a useless Push-Me, Pull-You to a powerful team of oxen, working together for the same cause: "Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

What do two lives being transformed by God look like? Christ and His Bride! And what flows out of making decisions God's way? Beauty.

We look like Christ and His bride, the Church, as God helps us do what we can never do on our own. As He helps us put our spouse first. As He helps us respond in love to each when we want to lash out or withhold forgiveness. As He helps us teach each other how to love each other. As He helps us to speak honestly about needs, but in love and with encouragement rather than expecting to be married to a mind-reader. As He prepares us for the storms and gives us strength to persevere. As He gives us humility to share with others and ask for their help. As He gives our husbands wisdom and as He grows our confidence in God's use of them as His leaders in our lives.

God does this wonderful work as we "feed" on the good food that brings godliness: through our prayers, through our time in His Word, through the encouragement of other believers, and through the work of God's Holy Spirit in our hearts, helping us to choose His ways over our own, as we practice them over and over and over again in daily life.

Finding Balance

As I'm writing this, we have just clocked in our 44th year of marriage. By the Lord's grace, the two, clumsy dance partners make one pretty good pair now after all these daily rehearsals that God has scheduled in our lives. And still, I would have to say, the number one thing we have had to do together is make decisions. And the number one thing that has helped us make those together is God's work of godliness in us. Nowhere has this been truer than in finding a good balance between marriage/family and ministry.

As we've seen already, biblical requirements for our pastor/elder husbands make it quite clear that ministry isn't a "punch-my-timecard-in-at 9-and-punch-out-at-5" kind of life. This calling isn't one that simply depends upon a man's gifts to teach, but actually looks at their 24/7 life of godliness and care for their marriage/families to be qualified to become or to continue as a pastor/elder.

This means-ministry-shaped marriage is the life we are signing up for with our pastor-husbands. But this also means that while your marriage and family life will grow a heart for nourishing the flock, the comings and goings of that ministry will be shaped by the needs of your marriage/family that you might flourish, even as he is nourishing the church.

Right. Sounds like two halves of a pie: ministry pie and marriage/family pie. Put them together and you are all set. But, if you think that these two sides fit perfectly together tidily in one, little pie pan, you are in for quite a surprise. Marriage and ministry are a dance being learned by clumsy partners every bit as much as you and your husband might have been as you started out in marriage.

But this time, it feels less like a two-partnered waltz, and more like a hundred or even thousand-partnered bunny hop, that tries to accommodate all the members of your church as well as your spouse and your family! How in the world can we learn to choreograph this kind of life? It will take practice and patience. It will take the input of wise counsel. And it will most definitely take godliness.

Here are some of the best "dance steps" that Mark and I have learned through our years of marriage in ministry:

1. Seek God to Guide You
Godliness is loving God and desiring to carry out His Word. It's not starting with what I want or what you want, but what God wants, knowing that will also be best for us. We do not have to be a Push Me, Pull You creature. We can go together to God's Word and see what He says.

God's Word tells us that a man is first called to be a godly man, a good husband and a good father. Without these attributes, he cannot even qualify to be a pastor. So… the shape of ministry should make room for time with the Lord, time to enrich your marriage, and time to teach and care for your children.

God's Word also tells us that a pastor is a man who is to have God's heart of love for the local church. He is to be a good under-shepherd, taking his cues from the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for the sheep. He will give his life to leading them well, through disciplining them, teaching them, praying for them, showing them hospitality and being an example for them in their own lives. Their marriages and family life will bear the impact and be an opportunity for ministry.

Knowing these two truths helps us look together at our lives and make good decisions that care for the family as well as the church. It will still be hard to make these two sides of life fit well together, but at least we know God's priorities and what to look for. Even if there aren't easy solutions, it helps to know what the goal is, to be encouraged that we agree upon that goal, and to strive for unity as we seek that goal.

2. Seek God to Grow in Patience
Knowing a goal and getting to the finish line are two very different things. So it is with finding a good balance in marriage and ministry. Not only does it take a lot of time to learn how to juggle these two well, but it seems that marriage or ministry is always tossing in an extra ball to keep in the air. We might just be getting down what it is like to be a young, married couple in the ministry, only to add in a baby. We might have a workable, regular ministry schedule, when suddenly there's a crisis that requires a lot more time. Etc. etc. Our little plans are upset and our lives stumble out of balance.

These difficulties could put us at odds with each other. But with God's help, we can show patience with each other as we make our way to a new balance. We can see these changes as coming from God's hand and see each other as partners to help each other adjust to them. We can trust in God's sovereignty, take confidence in His provision, seek His wise counsel through His Word and His people.

Godliness is the trunk of the tree for our lives in ministry and in marriage. Its roots stretch down into God and His Word. From such nutrients, God can grow your two into one, and make that one bear much fruit, no matter what the season or how the storms may blow.

> "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers." – Psalm 1:1

3. Four Great Prayers for Godliness in Your Marriage

• Ask God to continue to grow your attraction to each other even as beauty fades with age; solidify your vows of commitment to each other no matter what difficulties may try to pull you apart; extend your faithfulness to each other daily, persevering in love to the end of life; and expand your graciousness towards each other even when hurt or wronged (Mark's four recommendations from his CHBC wedding sermon.) Each of these are highlighted in Ephesians 4 and Christ's love for the Church. They are wonderful reflections of His love in our marriages.

• Ask God to knit you together by your love for Him and His will. Ask Him to make your joint love for Him to be the cornerstone of your marriage and the deciding factor in your treatment of each other and the plans for your life together. Ask Him to make you partners in the gospel, as displayed in your hearts, your lives, your home, and at church.

• Ask God to give you good, believing friends to share honestly about your marriage and humble hearts to hear their advice. Ask God to make you and your spouse good friends who can share honestly with each other and humble hearts to hear each other's advice.

• Ask God to give you eyes quick to see good, mouths filled with encouragement, minds that record acts of kindness, hearts filled with gratitude, and hands ready to out-do each other in service towards each other.

4. Four great things to remember as you seek unity in your marriage:

• Your spouse is different from you. A different sex. A different frame. A different personality. A different past. A different set of strengths and weakness. Don't expect him to see life just like you. Don't expect him to struggle with the same things as you. Don't expect him to be a mind-reader. Don't expect your spouse to know your needs or likes/dislikes without you communicating them.

And even when you tell him, don't expect it to be a "once-and-done" thing. It takes time. Sometimes a lifetime. You and your husband will always be a learner about each other. Always. It is a little picture of the way we will always learn more about God through all of eternity. It can be frustrating, but it **helps to think of it as exploration of a new land, acquiring a new language.

• Do not assign (your own) motives to your spouse's actions. There are often more than one reason for saying or doing something. Many times our spouse does something unhelpful out of ignorance or novice-ness. Rarely is outright maliciousness the cause, but it can be tempting to assume it is. So much

hurt can be avoided by trying to understand each other's action before reacting.

• Everyone hears better with encouragement. Make it your business to catch your spouse doing good things and thanking him for them, especially in areas he is weak. When you do bring up something difficult, try to also tell him things you appreciate or ways you see him growing in the area of weakness. Encouragement puts you on the same team and helps to lower defensiveness and set a better context for what you have to say.

• Your spouse is no replacement for your God. You will always be married to a sinner. You will always be married to someone who can only meet a portion of some of your needs. He will never know you or love you as well as God does. Appreciate the good gift he is, but don't expect him to provide for you what only God can.

5. Four great things to put in place ahead of time for your marriage:

• A designated, go-to couple you both respect to help you through difficulties. Similarly, this is designating a couple ahead of time so that when you come to a difficulty, you don't have to work through finding a suitable couple. Ideally, this is a couple a bit older than you who can bring perspective of years to your impasse.

• Regular check in's. Whether this be once a year or once a week or something in between, set up times to take inventory of aspects of your marriage that you are working on. And don't just set a date for these, but set goals for these times. Such as ways you have seen each other grow as well as ways you might still need to improve. Make these times of encouragement in any way possible for the points of criticism to be well received.

• Date nights Don't coast on good times past. Build upon them. Set aside regular couple time to enjoy each other and grow your relationship. You don't have to spend money to have a date, but you do have to spend time.

• Look out for transitions. Expect life to get bumpy whenever you go through a big transition. A new job. A new baby. A move. A change in health. etc. You may have a wonderful "system" for marital bliss only to see the whole thing upset by a transition. Recognize transitions as times of relational overhauls and work together to find a new balance. Acknowledge that it will take time to adjust and partner together to help each other get to a new healthy pattern for normal.

6. Four great things to remember as you make decisions, especially when trying to balance marriage/family and ministry:

• Find the Good: What good things are we trying to do? What are the worthy benefits of each choice you are deciding among… to ministry to marriage/family life, particularly the good in the other person's favored option?

• Filter through Desires: Are we looking at this decision as my desire versus your desire? If so, what is the desire each of you are hoping to fulfil? How can you respect these desires and care for each other?

• Facilitate Agreement: Can we take the good we see in each option and find a solution that includes the best from both? Which option most closely fits our shared vision for flourishing the family while nourishing the church? How can we be on the same team over this matter?

• Feed Well: Does God's Word shed light on this topic? Have we prayed about this? Is there anyone among God's people who might give us helpful counsel? And if there is no specific counsel on this point of decision, what general principles of loving each other and leadership in family that can help us make this decision? What in the character of God and the trustworthiness of His Word can give us confidence that He will help us make a good decision?

One wise friend once said, "The number one thing you will do with your spouse is make decisions." How very true, especially in the ministry. Not only are you making decisions that are good for the two of you, or for your whole family, but you are constantly making decisions about how much to sacrifice in your family life for the good of the gospel/your local church. We know from 1 Timothy 3 that pastors are not just to NOURISH the church, but also at the same time, FLOURISH their family. And, since both family needs and church needs are constantly changing, that leaves you and your husband needing to make a lot of decisions to keep everything in good and healthy balance.

The Devers, now at 40+ years in ministry, have begun to get better at balancing things, but still, we have much to learn. But I'm so grateful that our difficulties largely stem from not properly estimating how much time various ministry opportunities really require, NOT a disunity over what God would have us do. I have to chalk this up to continually seeking the Lord and Him kindly giving us united hearts in our love for Him and His people.

If there are two things that will trip up a family in ministry life they are: not being in unity about God's priorities and not living out those priorities. As we seek God in prayer and Bible study, He teaches us and transforms us, our unity with our spouse grows and we come to unity more easily. As we seek the biblical counsel of God's people (especially other, more seasoned pastors and their wives), God grows us in unity that helps us better balance family and ministry.

I can't overstate how important unity has been in our ministry life! It's so easy to be like Dr. Doolittle's Push-Me, Pull-You as you and your husband navigate the clamoring needs/desires of your family and your church family. Looking together, growing together, being transformed together, helps align your vision and make the best decisions that both nourish the church and flourish the family, and choosing the best places for the sacrifices that you will need to make for this to happen.

Show Grace

Our husbands may need lots of grace to lead in our home and in church, but we need lots of grace to respond to their leadership in a godly manner, too. We both need to show grace to each other.. most every day! Our sin, our inexperience, our personalities, and our pasts, present, and future, will mean that they lead us and we follow them imperfectly. We need to ask God for patience and forgiveness as much as the air we breathe. And we need to make honesty and encouragement the twin engines that help our husbands lead and help us submit in a way that glorifies God.

Questions for you

1. What areas of the balance between marriage and ministry have you and your husband had to worked hardest to find unity?
2. How has seeking God and growing in godliness helped you and your husband find unity in decisions?
3. How has prayer, God's Word, and God's people specifically helped you do this?
4. Any words of wisdom about how you and your husband have learned to grow in unity that might be helpful to share with others?

From Section 2: Finding All We Need in God

"Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the Lord,
'You are my Lord; apart from you, I have no good thing.'" Psalm 16:1-2

13 Ways to Help You and Your Husband Seek the Lord While in the Ministry

Here are some ideas for how you and your husband can help each other continue to grow your relationship with the LORD and in godliness.

1. Remember that our life depends upon God
But I think there was something in David's heart that encouraged his constant conversation with God. I think the last phrase in verse two points to it: "for apart from You I have no good thing."

"Apart from You I have no good thing" David wrote. He knew his life depended upon God. There just was nowhere else to go. If there was something he needed, David knew that ultimately God would be the one to provide it. David knew he must seek God's aid in times of trouble. If he was delivered from a dangerous situation or enjoyed good things, David knew that ultimately he had God to thank for it. This fueled David to pray, and it can fuel us, too.

This clinging to God as the source instead of the means of His grace is especially important for us as pastor's wives. There are many times we may be tempted to push our husbands to fix this church situation or to do more with that troubled member. We may be impatient for changes in our church and expect our husbands to be the ones to change it and change it now. While we certainly want to encourage our husbands to say or do the difficult things that need to be done in love, we need to be careful that we are not really pushing for them to rush imprudently into change because we are impatient with God's timing. Like David, we need to be praying about these situations, both for God to work out changes in His perfect timing and by whatever means He chooses—using our husbands or not, as the case may be.

Most pastors deal with feelings of impatience to see certain situations or people would change. Sometimes this may tempt them to say or do things rashly in an attempt to affect a change now! Sometimes God may make this attitude a bit clearer to us than it is to them. God very well may desire to use a gentle, winsome, humble word from us to help them to turn away from acting rashly and to turn back and depend upon God and His timing. Carolyn Mahaney's talk called "Watch Your Man," available online is a great resource for learning how to do this.

Our husbands and we are far from the only ones facing the temptation to hurry along a particular outcome to a long-standing problem. There will likely be many times when we will need offer the same kind of gentle, humble winsome reminder we might offer our husbands to others in our church. We can pray with them for change in the situation, but point them back to trusting God's timing and leading in changing the situation.

2. Have Regular Devotions

This may seem like something we do not even need to state it is so obvious: strive to have a regular, daily devotional time. After all, who is in God's Word more than a man who regularly preaches it and regularly uses it to guide his loving leadership in the local church he pastors, or his wife, who lives this life alongside of him. It's like the air we breathe. And yet, we DO need to say this because sometimes God's Word feels more like a "tool of the trade" rather than the "words of life" to those in the ministry. Sometimes we are around it so much that we don't take time to meditate for their own soul's sake, rather than only for others.

3. Have Regular Checkups with Your Spouse

Ask each other if you are regularly having a devotion time with the Lord. Take time to ask each other what you are learning. What is God teaching you? What are you particularly enjoying about God? Share if/how you have been struck by a struggle with sin in any way as you've read God's Word? What are you thanking God for or asking God for your own soul these days? Does your relationship with the Lord seem dry and distance, or these rich days? Find out if there is any way you can encourage each other's times with the Lord, practically or simply prayerfully. If you are in a season of life with kids, finding time alone with God and His Word can be especially difficult. Put your heads together and figure out how to make this top priority a reality!

4. Keep Your Eye on the End, Not on the Means in Family Worship

Before I was married, I had a little ideal in my head of what family worship would look like, then I had kids! My dreams of eager faces, lapping up every word as my husband led us through a Scripture passage, spouting out their catechism questions and sitting still through prayers, wilted in our busy lifestyle and our kids wiggly behavior. For a while we forced things to look like we had envisioned, but our way was exasperating our kids. Ok, now we KNEW that was bad! (Ephesians 6:4).

We stopped looking at the means we planned to use and started thinking about the end. We wanted our kids to know the gospel. We wanted to leave a library of God's truth in their heads. We wanted them to see the mighty acts of God, both in Bible times thousands of years and in answered prayers this very afternoon. We began to use a missionary model and strategized how to best achieve these good goals with our particular kids.

Family worship took place during dessert. Bible stories were added to bedtime. We listened to Scripture songs as they danced around or as we drove in the car. We spoke of the Lord and prayed as we went through the day, a la Deuteronomy 6:7. These kinds of changes dialed back the exasperation and filled up their little hearts with the testimony of God and His Word.

5. Others Need to Know Us for God to Grow Us

Finding safe friends is a tricky thing for pastors and their wives. It takes time and discernment, but be patient and ask God to provide these very precious people, even if just one. You and your husband need someone with whom you can share your spiritual struggles and you can count on to be both supportive and honest.

As you assess your times of prayer, you will probably see patterns of strength and success and patterns of obstacles and weakness. Find somebody in a similar season of life and find somebody in the next season of life who has faced similar struggles to yours. Seek their advice. Ask for their prayers. Ask your husband to pray about these things for you, too. And if a change in schedule can help, he may be able to help you on the practical side as well. Don't forget: God may have called your husband to be a pastor, but he's called to care well for you, too.

Your husband needs to know your struggles. And together you need to figure out if your struggles or short-term issue or if they stem from a longer-term pattern. If they are coming from a longer-term pattern (such as chronic over-tiredness, almost never any time to study God's Word and pray because you are constantly on duty with the kids, etc.) that is spiritually unhealthy, then together you can think of practical ways to break the pattern and create a better environment for growth.

Encourage your husband in friendships in which he can share and receive advice about his own personal walk with the Lord, as well as times of discouragement in the ministry that affect his relationship with the Lord. Share with other pastor's wives your strengths and weaknesses you have had in praying for your husband's ministry. Ask them what they do to pray for their husband's ministry. Ask your husband how you can best be praying for him and his ministry.

6. Borrow from Others

Sometimes I feel like I get in a rut, praying the same old thing day after day. I find that by choosing to pray for people elements from by Bible reading, from the words of hymns or the prayers of other godly men and women from collections of prayers like The Valley of Vision help refresh my prayers for myself and others. The vast number of sermons available online provides great biblical teaching. Some days I'm just so busy with so much to do with my hands, but if I downloaded sermon I can listen to the audio and be growing my soul even as I'm folding laundry or driving home after dropping the kids off at school.

As you reflect on the words of the hymns and prayers you read, think of particular applications of the truths they contain to your roles in supporting your husband both at home and in his ministry. Pray that God would apply these truths to your heart and to your life and use them to help you support your husband even this very day as well as prepare you for how you will need to support him in the future. Think of particular applications to the truths to your husband's ministry and pray them for him: that God might encourage your husband with these truths, increasingly live them out, and, be able to use these truths in his words, actions and preaching to encourage others.

Ask God to grow these truths in the hearts of all your church members, bringing greater unity among God's people and greater glory to Himself.

7. Use Your Bible Reading to Inform Your Prayers

Ask God to not just help you understand the truths the Bible passage that you are studying contains, but also would use it to transform your life as you reflect on them. Bible study leads to godliness as what we know impacts how we grow.

Ask God to help you apply the passage to your husband and others, too, as you pray for them. Think about one truth from the passage that you could share with others. Ask Him to bring to mind anyone specific He might want you to encourage by the truths you've dwelled upon that day, either in person or by letter or email. Ask Him to put others in your path that might need to hear that truth and to give you the opportunity to say it to them.

8. Don't Care How You Feel

Our emotions are wonderful gifts from God and when they are working in our favor they help fuel our prayers. But, they are nothing to count on! Pray whether you feel like it or not! God doesn't value our prayers by the emotional heat of our heart but by their accordance with His will! Forge ahead even on dull days!

I have come to use times when I don't feel like praying as wonderful times of defiant prayer. What do I mean by that? I don't mean defiant against God, but defiant against my feelings.

Do I feel in despair about a situation? Then I am praising God for His sovereignty over the situation and His complete ability to do whatever needs to be done. I am thanking Him for His perfect timing in the situation and am asking Him to work powerfully in it, according to His good and perfect will. Does God feel far away? Then I am praising God for His Holy Spirit that dwells inside of me, comforting me and giving me strength and wisdom, even when I don't feel like it. I am thanking Him that He is near and I am asking Him to comfort me with His presence.

By these defiant prayers, God helps me to persevere and pray in the hardest, most unlikely times. The peace and joy He has brought me during these prayers have become some of the sweetest experiences in pray I have ever had.

Don't wait to feel your need for God's strength to help you through your day or for God to prepare you for situations that lie ahead. The truth is that you need it, whether you feel like it or not! On the other hand, your problem may not be struggling with feeling your need for God's strength, but struggling with feeling that God will provide for your needs in the situations of the day ahead.

Perhaps your husband has a night full of committee meetings and you are faced with caring for all the children alone that evening—including your young teenage girl who is going through a difficult patch of mouthiness and attitude. You've really been struggling with addressing her heart issues and behavior with a firm, loving, patient attitude with her instead of anger. It always seems to be particularly bad when your husband is absent. Will this be another evening of failure? You feel like no one can help you or your daughter. God certainly hasn't seemed to help you overcome your daughter's issues or yours. You wonder what good it does to pray. Don't care how you feel! Keep on praying! God may have not answered your prayers in your timing or your technique, but He is at work! Don't give up!

Unending budget problems. Tensions among staff. False accusations of church members. Writer's block on Saturday night. Squabbles over music style. A few disgruntled prominent members leave the church. Young sheep keep losing their struggle with destructive, besetting sin. Members who feel unloved or uncared for….and on and on. Sometimes the struggles and sin of the saints weighs our husbands down to deep discouragement. Yet it is these very same difficulties that provide opportunities for those beautiful, defiant prayers to God. God uses them to help us keep on praying for God to work out His will in each of these situations and to encourage our husbands to persevere through difficult ministry times.

Choosing to pray defiantly, against our feelings and the pessimistic outlook of a situation, can be a great way to help others in the church to persevere through trying circumstances in their lives, too. As they see us respond to our situations this way, they are encouraged to do so in their situations. And, when others in your church share their troubles with you, you can show not just compassion and sympathy or offer advice. You can pray defiantly with them about them. Now hear me, I am not saying that you down play the suffering they are going through as you talk with them and pray with them. To the contrary! You are acknowledging how difficult or even impossible their circumstances might be, but how much greater God is and how absolutely able He is to meet their needs in them.

We can fuel our desire to pray by remembering that God works powerfully through them. Our prayers, whether they are short or long, feel effortless or belabored, are all powerful. Why? Because God has ordained them to be so! He has woven the fulfillment of His great plans for the world into the prayers of His people. They are actually part of the good works that God prepared in advance for His people to do.

Now when I think of good works, prayer is not exactly the first thing that comes to mind. I don't know about you, but when I think of good works, I think of, well, get-your-hands-dirty good deeds. Prayer doesn't seem to fit the bill. But God clearly thinks differently from me on this matter. The New Testament alone has hundreds of accounts of God's people praying and commands for them to pray about a great number of different things.

Understanding that God has ordained to do great things through the prayers of His people can help us to pray more. Perhaps you are in a dry season and prayer is particularly difficult now. Think about how many prayers of yours that God has answered even during this season. If He has ordained to do as much as He has during this dry season, can you imagine what He might have ordained to do if we were to pray more?

We can fight to keep praying, remembering that God promises to powerful work through our prayers. No telling how our prayer-answering God may equip us for today and for the future through our prayers! No telling what ministry opportunities He may bring us or how He may choose to glorify Himself! This can help us to pray on!

We remind our husbands of God's plans to work through His people's prayers when they are discouraged. We can boldly pray for fruit from our husband's ministry, knowing that God has woven the fulfillment of His plans for even their ministry into the prayers of His people. This can encourage both us and our husbands to pray big and pray boldly for God's work through our husbands. Pray for powerful preaching, fruitful evangelism, growing knowledge, obedience and delight in God.

We can gather together, not just to chat, but to pray for each other. God gives His people far more than just a sympathetic ear to offer each other. He gives them to opportunity to intercede powerfully on their behalf, imploring their kind and generous Heavenly Father to care for their needs.

God has woven the working out of His plans into the prayers of His people. Let's be a part of that working out! If someone shares their discouragement or needs with you, stop right where you are and take a moment to pray about it. You will encourage them by your offer to pray, remind them that it is God who is Giver of all good things, as well as be at work already in asking God to work out His good plans in their lives.

9. Put Prayer, Scripture and God's People in Your Path

Daily devotion times are of great importance, but there are seasons of life when we are so busy that we seem to have little time to sit down and pray. And then there's the fact that life as a way of sending curve balls we could never anticipate.

Here are some ways to seek the Lord (and support your pastor-husband) during the day.

• Try posting Scripture around the kitchen sink to dwell on as you do the dishes, or near the rocking chair where you nurse your baby, and there's always the bathroom by the toilet. These can be nice little feeding troughs where you can meditate on God's word and pray in those free moments.

• Enlist your calendar in your prayer life. Mark important dates in others' lives to pray for. Pray through your husband's schedule. Google calendars make this easy. You can even color code different categories in your online calendar for easy reference. Have a category for your regular schedule but then make another category for your husband, your children, and others. If you have a gmail account, it will even send you daily alerts about anything you have listed for a particular date. When you check your email, you will be reminded to pray!

• Putting prayer in your path through sticky notes placed in key places around your house or through online calendar alerts are particularly useful when you, your husband and family, his ministry or others in the church are faced with a particular struggle or need that is a source of continual distraction, great urgency, dire need that you need to go back to pray for it again and again. When the problem includes a thorny heart issue, such as unforgiveness or bitterness, I like to include a Bible verse to remember to pray for the parties involved. The online calendar alerts are especially helpful for women who are in a season of life, like I am, who are doing a lot of computer work.

• Putting scripture and prayer in your path is also a great way for women on the go, living their lives in between car pool lines, the soccer field, piles of laundry and grocery store checkout aisles. A full-blown quiet time with time to pray and study the Bible may be a rarity. Putting prayer in your path can help you keep praying for more aspects of your life, your husband's ministry and the lives of others in your church even when you seem to have very little sit-still time. Make these the theme of your sticky notes or Google alerts that you put in your path.

• If you use sticky notes, take a pile of sticky notes with you into your church's prayer meeting or keep them by your telephone or computer desk, or other places where you tend to receive information about things to pray for others. Write down requests as you receive them and then put them in whatever spot you have designated to look at them as you do something else. And by the way, if you are praying about something of a sensitive nature, you may want to come up with a secret short hand to remind you of what to pray for, but not advertise the issue to the rest of the world via your sticky notes!

• If you are using online calendar alerts, you may want to take a note pad with you to church and keep one by the telephone, computer desk, etc. to write down the prayer requests and add them to your calendar when you get a chance to go online.

• Pray for God's strength, wisdom and blessing upon each segment of your schedule as you come to it. Ask Him for wisdom to give you the right words to speak to a hurting friend. Ask Him for strength to bear patiently with your children or to maintain a forgiving spirit with an angry member who has decided you should know how offended they were about how your husband or the elders handled a particular situation. Ask Him to bless your efforts to make your home a welcoming, restful place for your husband as you clean. Thank Him as-you-go, too, as you see Him answer prayer after prayer!

• Learn the rhythm of your husband's daily schedule and pray for it as you go through your day. Ask him in the morning what he has planned for the day and how you could best pray for him. How encouraging it has been for my husband to be greeted at the end of day with not just the general "how was your day?" question, but questions about how specific events have gone!

• When life gets busy, add in "tag along" women into your life to come along with you and spend time intentionally building each other up, spiritually. Driving to pick up the kids from school? Take some one along to share what God is teaching you from Scripture or how you can pray for each other. Folding laundry? Fold another lady into your task and listen to a sermon or podcast and talk about it. These are just two examples of how you can add people into what you are doing already and seek God at the same time.

• Weave Stop and Pop Up Prayers into your daily life. A Stop and Pop Up prayer is stopping and praying right when someone shares something that needs prayer. Instead of saying, "I'll be praying about that," (and me usually forgetting to pray about it later), it's saying, "Let's pray about that right now." It has been one of the best tips of seeking God along my daily path that I've ever learned. And I'm so grateful for professor Christy Wilson for teaching it to me.

10. Don't Miss Your Church's Worship Gatherings

Gathering together to worship God and to receive His Word is so very important for each of us… and you are NO EXCEPTION! They are a wonderful and crucial part of our being fed upon God's Word and refreshed by the Holy Spirit.

Audience Issues

God's people gathering together for worship each week now as a dress rehearsal of the great Day when God's people from every tribe and nation gathered together before God's throne, worshipping Him forever. But for both pastors and their wives, these weekly dress rehearsals sometimes feel more like "Opening Night" with their stomachs full of jitters and the audience filled with critics. I know I certainly struggled with this problem, especially during the first months of my husband's time at a new church; or, when he is going through a season of criticism from the congregation. My body might be sitting in the pew and my eyes might be focused on my husband, but my heart was not receiving God's Word. Instead, it was taken up with analyzing his sentence structure or calculating popularity votes. My stomach was twisted up with stress instead of my soul filled up with truth.

What has helped me when I've struggled in this way? Five things have helped:

- Asking God to help my husband enjoy God and grow from the worship service, even as he is leading it. That he would be preaching to himself every bit as much as he is preaching to the congregation.
- Confessing to God my sin of fearing people and desiring popularity
- Asking for God's grace to help me focus on His Word and not on my man
- Turning my gaze on the Lord and the fact that it gives him pleasure when his people gather together to worship him and love one another. This gathering of his church is not a club meeting, it is a gathering before Him, for His glory and our good.
- Entrusting God to work through His Word in others, however He desires
- Taking sermon notes to force my mind onto what was being preached

Don't Just Show Up; Be Filled Up

Another challenge that many pastors' wives face is simply to get to be in the service to worship and hear God's Word at all! Perhaps there's a shortage of nursery workers, or no one to teach the children or a special lunch that must be prepared during the service so that it is ready to be served immediately afterwards. Many times the pastor's wife volunteers to fill in the gap or make the extra sacrifice that is needed to serve others. This may be especially true in small churches/church plant situations. Or, there may be an attitude problem yet again with one of your children during the service; or perhaps one always seems to be sick and needs to stay at home. With your husband in the pulpit, you are the only one left to take care of the issue during the service. And there you are, once more missing the preaching of the word.

Catching It Later Is Missing Out

If you "just" missing the preaching of the Word you might be tempted to think it's not such a big deal. You can always just look up the passage and reflect on it yourself another time. If your husband sermons are available online, you can catch it later. But the truth is, the Lord has called your husband to be a shepherd over all of the sheep in your church – – including you. And chances are, if it is anything like my husband, his sermon preparation has involved far more depth and many more hours of both study and prayer than my daily devotion of the same passage usually does. He has been called to be the encourager of God's people. And that message is something the Holy Spirit may use to work powerfully in your heart. But you have to be there to hear it.

Spiritual Superfood

But there's more. Hearing the preaching of the word is not the only spiritual discipline going on during each weekly gathering of your church. Look at this passage from Colossians:

> "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Do you see that your church's worship service is like a superfood devotion. The singing of this hymns and spiritual songs, the prayers, the testimonies as new Christians are baptized and as mature Christians share what God is doing in their lives, the sharing of the Lord's Supper, the giving of our tithes and offerings, the opportunity to bring non-Christians to church to hear God's Word and see how God's people love each other, the fellowship that takes place afterwards. All of these, plus the preaching of the word take place when you gather together. Your personal devotions at home our little dress rehearsals for your weekly gatherings of the local church. In your weekly gatherings of your church, on the dress rehearsals for God's people gather together with God in heaven.

Encourage from the Pew

All of this would be reason enough to see how important it is for you to regularly be a part of the church service if you were just another member. But you aren't just another member. You're the pastor's wife. That service allows you a chance to encourage your husband's hard work. It allows you as a couple or even a family to discuss at home what you took part of the church. It can fuel your prayers and times in God's word throughout the rest of the week. It prepares you to have encouraging conversations with church members or visitors, some of which you may want to share with your husband at home, and that helps him understand them and love them better as their pastor.

I would strongly urge you to watch for patterns of absenteeism from the church service. Your heart might be more heavily invested in seeing your husband's ministry thrive through you making another "little sacrifice" during the service, but you will serve all far better by regularly feeding your soul together with the saints than regularly sacrificing for them in this way.

Many church plants and small churches especially face a shortage of volunteers in childcare. It's easy to feel like you should fill the holes whenever they arise. I know I certainly did when our church was small. It felt like the best way to keep families happy so they would keep coming back. And that would encourage my husband's ministry.

But beware! Take time to discuss with your husband how much time he thinks it is good for you to spend missing the service and filling these shortages. And if there are some Sundays when there is no childcare or teaching for the children because no one else has volunteered, then so be it. Cheerfully obey your husband's advice to be in the service and make the shortages a point of prayer. Remember: God is the ultimate provider for His church. You are only His servant. Trust God to fill the needs. Not only does this allow you to receive God's Word, but it is a great model of obeying your husband and trusting God to encourage others in the congregation, too.

11. The Two-Way, 4-for-1 Deal

Kind of like a calendar, is your church' s sermon card. This is a listing of upcoming sermons and the Scriptures that they are on. If your church has one (or if your husband has a listing of what he plans to preach, he can share that with you even if you don't have a sermon card), then you can do what I call a 4-for-1 Deal. There's two of them.

4-for-1 Deal #1: Get quadruple value out of your study of Scripture by studying the passage during the week what your husband plans to preach on the following Sunday. This allows you to reflect on the passage yourself, enjoy discussions with your husband on it, pray more specifically for God to help your husband preach it truthfully and powerfully, and then have you better prepared to learn even more as your husband preaches on it Sunday morning. Even if your husband doesn't know the passage he's preaching from until later in the week, you can reverse the order: hear his sermon on Sunday then meditate upon it throughout the following week.

4-for-1 Deal #2: (Easier to do on the go, if that matters) Take your bulletin from the previous week's service and meditate on the songs, scripture verses, and any notes from the sermon you wrote down. Get quadruple value out of your study of Scripture by studying the passage during the week what your husband plans to preach on the following Sunday. This allows you to further marinate in the truths reflected in that service and ask God to grow them in your life and the lives of others.

As my husband says, "Your encouragement to me is like the wind in my sails." So, whether it's discussing his preaching passage with him ahead of time and sharing our reflections, in the week before he gives it; or, if I'm sharing with him the truths God taught me and is helping apply to my heart during the week after he's preached, this is deeply encouraging to him. Even if no one else learned anything from the passage he worked so hard on, he knows that I, the one he treasures most did.

Sometimes we feel like we don't know what to pray for others because we just don't know what's going on in their lives. But one thing we do know that if there in church they are going to hear from God's Word. We can pray in advance for them as we meditate on the upcoming sermon passage in preparation week. Or, we can be praying that passage (and application points from our husband's sermon) for them after they've heard the preaching, if we are meditating on the previous Sunday's service.

12. Don't Simply Study for Others

Don't confuse time spent speaking about the Lord with time spent speaking to the Lord. Your husband and even you may spend quite a bit time every week preparing to teach God's Word. This time of preparation can be a rich time of study, but don't just study to teach someone else. Make sure you take time to dwell upon the truths and seek the Lord for the sake of your own soul, too.

13. Be Grateful for the Times of Bible Study, Prayer and Worship Service Attendance You Do Have

It's easy to get discouraged with our weaknesses in Bible study and prayer. It's easy to feel like you will never escape the tyranny of the urgent with a sick kid or a last-minute ministry need that takes us out of the worship service we are trying to so desperately to regularly attend! We still don't have daily quiet times, or at least they are not as long or in some way fruitful as we would like. We still forget to thank God at the end of the day for the many blessings He gave us. We still do not feel as close to God as we think we should, etc.

This is a trick of our great enemy! Satan knows that any prayer of God's people is powerful. He would rather shut you down with discouragement than have you pray as you now are. Don't play into his hand! Instead of just beating yourself up for what you aren't doing yet, thank God for what He has enabled you to do. Yes, certainly ask Him for more grace, but be grateful for what grace He has given you already.

Perhaps as pastors' wives, it is especially easy to beat ourselves up over our shortcomings in these areas. Shouldn't we be especially strong? Haven't we seen up-close more than most God's power and blessing in our lives and the lives of others? But these are all just Satan's ploys. Forget the pecking order of what we should be compared to others! Thank God for however He has helped you to pray and however He has answered your prayers for yourself, your husband's ministry and for others. Thank Him for what you DO glean from the worship services you DO attend. Ask for God's forgiveness for laziness or over-busyness or a dry heart, receive His forgiveness and praise Him for His mercy! Yet again, He shows us that we need a Savior! Yet again, what a great depth to grace we are! Then move on! Ask Him for more grace, more strength, more blessing! Ask Him to help you and your husband scheme for more or better time for you to grow.

Questions for You

1. What are some things you have done that have helped you or your husband to keep seeking after God?
2. How hard is it for you to regularly be in the worship service? Do you see an impact on your spiritual health when you are missing too much?
3. How does the season of life of your family impact your personal time with the Lord? Any tips you can share with others in the same season of life?
4. Do you have any words of wisdom you can share with using your personal devotion times to undergird your husband's ministry?
5. What has helped you or your husband during spiritually difficult or dry times?

Some Final Words of Encouragement

Over the last few sections, we have seen how seeking the Lord is so important to both our husbands and to us in our personal life, in our married life, and in our ministry life. We've looked at the three, very powerful means that God's Holy Spirit use to grow us in our knowledge of God and our godliness—prayer, studying God's Word, and being encouraged by God's people. I've offered many practical suggestions that can help you strengthen one another through these means. Are you overwhelmed yet? You might be. Here are a few words to encourage you before we close this section on seeking the Lord.

Not Your New Standard of Success, Not a To-Do List, More Like a Help Wanted Ad

Please do not make any of my suggestions your new litmus test of whether you are a loser-wife to your pastor-husband or not! These are simply ideas of how you could possibly support him as you seek the Lord. Think of them as possibilities and come up with your own. They are NOT a to-do list!

This Is God's Gift that He Loves to Give

We do not seek God on our own. It is a work of God. It is His promised gift to us. Our inability points us to our need for God. We must ask Him to help us. It is only by God's gracious gifts to us that we ever change! Remember the phrase at the end of this verse: "Apart from You I have no good thing."? We should not be surprised that we will have to ask God to help us have this kind of fellowship with Him? And the great news is that this is a gift that God delights to give us! God created us to know and love Him. He created us for fellowship with Him and what is prayer if not the fellowship of earth through the Holy Spirit that is a foretaste of the exquisite feast of knowing God face to face in heaven?

Yes, this is a gift we can count upon receiving from God if we ask Him, for it is a request for more of His Holy Spirit. Remember Jesus' promise in Luke 11:13: "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

God promises to give us more of the Holy Spirit if we ask Him; and through Him, God can work powerfully in us! He can grow in our hearts a greater desire to speak with Him. He can prompt our hearts to pray. He can help us have the discipline to persevere in prayer even when we don't feel like it. We can ask Him to give our heart a new lens: one that clarifies our spiritual vision and helps us to see Him and His glorious plans at work in this life. And in response cry out to Him with our praise, thanksgiving for what He has done and our desire for Him to do even more.

We can ask God to help us pray today to work in our hearts and prepare us by His Spirit for the times that are ahead. We do not know what lies ahead in our husband's ministry that will tempt us to respond in sinful ways. We don't know what ways He may call us to serve. But God does. He can equip us today for what lies ahead. And when trials come, we can know that God has already been at work, preparing us for them.

We can ask God to help us to pray for our husband's ministry. If it is a dry ministry time, we can ask God to help us to keep persevering in prayer for fruit and joy. If it is a bountiful ministry time, we can ask Him to help us to keep on praying, remembering that He is the source of all the good fruit that our husband's ministry is experiencing. We can share with others our own struggles in prayer, asking them to pray for God to help us, too. We can encourage others who are struggling to pray with our own struggles, by praying for God to help them and by sharing with them some of the ideas from this section that we have found helpful.

"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen." Ephesians 3:20-21

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

Delighting in God's People: Why?

August 14, 1984, is a day I will never forget. The pregnancy test came back positive. The due date of our first child, calculated. I was both excited and petrified. The weight of what we set into motion sunk in. I wasn't just going to have a child. I was about to give away my heart. "What have we done?" I thought. For the rest of my life, my happiness, at least in part, would be tied to the life of this new person. God was placing this child's care into our hands. God was putting some of His love for this little person in our hearts. The life this child lived and the decisions he/she made would impact me until the day I died. What a day of mixed emotions that was!

That night I had a dream. A little girl was standing near Mark and when I looked at her, my heart soared with love and joy. "Is this our little girl? Have we given her a name" I asked Mark. "If she has no name yet, I'd like to call her "Joy" because she fills my heart with joy.

April 25, 1985, was what I nicknamed "Christmas in April. It was a day gifts were exchanged what would keep on giving all these years later—gifts of joy, love and delight. That was the day when my real little girl was born. We named her Anne, but in my heart, her name has always been Joy. (And if there is a boy equivalent for Joy, so could her brother, Nathan, who came along a few years later.) For while there have been many days when not everything has been happiness in their lives, and indeed, my heart has both soared and broken over them and with them, they indeed have filled my life with so much joy and taught me so much about love.

There's been the joy of watching them grow and become fine adults. There's been the love that deepens when we commit to caring for someone sacrificially for so many years, and the delight of our friendship. But also the joy and love of the Lord, which proves to be stable, rich and bountiful, even as happiness and human affection waxes and wanes. And helped us delight in our children even at times when they were not delightful.

September 25, 1994, could be nicknamed "Christmas in September." It was the day gifts were exchanged what would keep on giving all these years later—gifts of love, joy and delight. That was the Sunday when husband took his vows to become the pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church. It was the day we gave our hearts away, not just to two little newborns who would bear our name, but to a whole church of people who bore the name of Christ. And while there have been many days when not everything has been happiness, and indeed our hearts have both soared and broken over them and with them, they have indeed filled our lives with so much joy and taught us so much about love.

There's been the joy of watching them grow and mature in Christ. There's been the love that deepens when we commit to caring for someone sacrificially for so many years, and the delight of our fellowship. But also, the joy and love of the Lord, which proves to be stable, rich and bountiful, even as happiness and human affection waxes and wanes. And helped us delight in the church members even at times when they have not been delightful.

I start out with this story because in many ways in echoes both Mark's and my experience with God's people in our local church. And I think it's why David could say that the "saints in the land" (God's people)

were all his delight. NOT because they were always delightful to care for as their king. But because of who they were to God, who God chose them to be in this world, and who they would be one day in glory. As happiness is different from joy, so is delightful from delighting in. Delightful comes and goes. Delighting in is constant that comes from God.

In this section we will look at who are the saints, what it means to delight in them, the special ways God gives our husbands and us to love them, the blessing they are and how to keep on loving them even when they aren't being delightful and our hearts are breaking.

"As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight. Psalm 16:3 Psalm 16:2-3 describe the two, great loves in a believer's life: the love of God, in verse 2; and the love of God's people, in verse 3. And these loves are not just to rule our heart but to be the superhighway of our lives. But who are these saints? And what makes them glorious? How do we delight in them? And what special callings does delighting in them bring to our husbands as pastors as their wives? That's what this section is all about.

Who Are the Saints?

Saints, in the biblical sense, in a word that describes all of God's people. In the Hebrew, this word is "qadoshim:" the holy ones. That is, people consecrated to God: set apart by God in a special relationship and for His service.

What Makes Them Glorious?

David called God's people the glorious ones in the land, and so they were! They alone worshipped God instead of idols. They alone knew and loved God and they reflected His glory by obeying His good laws. And, indeed, they WERE glorious in the land, even to the peoples who worshipped idols who were amazed at how the LORD set His love and protection on His people in a way unlike any god they had ever seen. This was reason enough for David to find all his delight in God's people.

But what David saw in God's people that made them glorious was only like a sparkler spitting out a little glitteriness compared to the full-sky, dazzling display of God's plans that God has revealed to us in His Word since Christ has come.

Now we know that God's people are glorious because:

- They were destined for glory, before the world even began.
- God is transforming them into the likeness of His Son, Jesus, throughout their lives.
- And, because one day, they will be glorified completely in heaven.

What an amazing God! What an amazing plan! To make people like you and me glorious!

Sin Makes Shepherding Hard

But in case you haven't noticed yet, delighting in God's people is anything but straightforward. If our husbands were always perfectly godly leaders, eager to preach and able to give perfect counsel. If church members were always eager to learn and eager to live out. It sounds like a foretaste of heaven, doesn't it? How wonderful it would be to live among such people of God and to fellowship with them. What a powerful witness to those around them they surely must be, as holy and glorious ones! If only… if only… Then it would be just as David says it in Psalm 16:2: "As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight.

But sadly, the sin we all need to grow out of to grow up into maturity in Christ has a way of tangling and

messing up everything. We dishonor God's name with our lack of faith. We hurt the ones we promise to love. They hurt us.

Maybe we don't struggle with our versions of David's favorite saints. You know, faithful friend Jonathan; the honest, loving spiritual leader, Nathan; the peace-making Abigail; the needy but grateful Mephibosheth; or the faithful, die-hard mighty men; but what the other saints with the more sinful tendencies in David's line-up? The politically driven Joab? The self-ambitious Saul? The keeping-up-appearances Michal? The undependable, easy-manipulated common people of Israel? And even, the godly, yet sinful David?

I don't know about you, but I have to admit that every church I've been a part of has included these less-than-easily-lovable line-up of saints. And to make matters worse, many times my first response to the saints has not been to take God's perspective on them, like David does in Psalm 16. Instead, when people are difficult or awkward, when they make stupid remarks or even outright sin, my natural tendency is to react to their sin rather than remember the perspective of the God who loves them and who saved them through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Frankly, often I'd rather just withdraw from the saints, or avoid the saints or grumble about the saints. I'd rather act like I don't know the saints… or even encourage the saints to switch churches where someone else can delight in them. When I look around at them, with my own set of eyes, I often don't see that much to delight in at least some of them.

And before you think I'm pointing the finger only outwardly, I have to confess that I've seen vestiges of them all in my heart, too. I have been passive when I should be active. I have desired God and His good ways, yet been prone to being tempted and blinded, and all too easily dragged down by my own sinful folly! Every good intention I have, every good work I do, is laced within with the poison of my own sin. How very true is Isaiah 64:6: "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away."

"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Romans 7:24-25

Why Delight Despite Sin?
With saints like this in our churches, it can seem a very tall order to delight in them; yet, that is exactly what God is calling us to do. Delight in them, love them… all. And do this now, not when they have more of their act together. Why is this so important? Once more, we need to look to God for answers:

We should delight in the saints because God has woven us into His plans for making them glorious, and them into His plans to make us glorious.

We may all be in the "now and not yet" time in terms of being glorified, but this is the "ready set and go" time for helping each other grow in being glorious. God has given us all good works to do that he prepared in advance. Most of these have to do with helping each other become more glorious, more like Christ. Many times, this is a lovely task, such as when someone receives sweet comfort from God's word and we watch them blossom in their new understanding of His love.

Other times, this is hard, even painful work, such as when we humbly show someone their sin as a kindness and they respond by lashing out at us. But even in those hardest of times, God intends for good to come from it. When we respond in love, 1 Corinthians 13 love, we are asking God to help us delight in the unlovely for their good and for his glory. There is no harm. There is no pain. There is no difficulty that is outside of God's plans to make his people glorious. So, while we might not always enjoy the saints, we

always can delight in them, knowing what God is using us to do in each other.

We should delight in the saints because there is no one else on earth like them.

The saints may not be perfect. They may even be downright frustrating or worse at times… just like we are to them, no doubt. But they are the only ones on earth who share God's Holy Spirit with us. They are the only ones who know God along with us. They are the ones who long for His Kingdom, along with us. And they are our only foretaste of heaven right here on earth. They are Christ's mouth, arms, legs and every other body part to us. God intended us to be His body of love to each other in a way that no one else can here on earth.

We should delight in the saints because God says a lack of delighting in them now shows a lack of delighting in Him now.

The book of 1 John is all about this!

> "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother." – 1 John 4:20-21

One of the greatest indications that we love God, is that we delight in the saints.

We should delight in the saints because they are dearly loved by God.

David knew that the people of Israel of his day had been chosen by God to be God's treasured possession. He knew of God's promises to Abraham to bless all nations through one of his offspring. He knew the stories of God's loving kindness shown to the stiff-necked Israelites over and over, even though they deserved His punishment.

David had ample reason to know God's great love for His people; yet God has allowed us to know so much more! We know that from before the beginning of time, God had set His love on His people. He chose to save them through Christ and make them beautiful through His blood. He has chosen to transform them to be like Jesus in this life. And in heaven, they will be the radiant Bride of Christ. They are worth delighting in because God's love for His people makes them worthy.

We should delight in the saints because of what He has given to them.

David knew that God had spoken His Word through the prophets of Israel that all might know Him, His great ways and His good laws. He knew that God gave His people great promises to care for them and bless them, as they trusted in Him and obeyed Him, even the pleasure of eternal life in His presence. He knew that God gave His people strength by His Holy Spirit to serve Him in this life and to persevere through life until that day when they would life with Him in heaven.

David had ample reason to know of God's good gifts to His people; yet God has allowed us to know so much more! We know that God even gave up His precious Son Jesus to save His people. And through Jesus, God has blessed His people with every spiritual blessing, including "all wisdom and understanding," including making known to us His glorious plans to bring all things "in heaven and on earth together" through Jesus. (Ephesians 1:3,8,9)

We should delight in the saints because of who He has planned for them to be in the world. David knew that God's people were the glorious ones in the land, that is, the ones who reflected God's and His good ways to the world and beckoned others to come and know Him, too. They did this when they lived by His

just and compassionate laws, which treated people radically differently from the nations around them. They reflected God and His good ways when they trusted Him, and He delivered them from powerful enemies. Even David's great grandmother, Ruth the Moabitess, had seen God and His good ways reflected in His people and turned away from the gods of the Moabites to trust in the LORD instead.

David had ample reason to know how God used His people to display His glory to the nations and encourage them to come to worship Him, yet God has allowed us to know so much more! We know that God has planned for His people to go to every nation, every people of every language to tell them the good news of Jesus and to show them what God is like, through His Word and through their lives. People from every nation will turn away from their sins and trust in Jesus as their Savior. On the Last Day, all of God's people will together make up the beautiful bride of Christ who radiates her bridegroom's glory perfectly.

We should delight in the saint because of what He has planned for them to be a display of to those who dwell in the great, unseen spiritual realms both now and in the world to come.

David knew only the faintest glimmer of truth. His psalms speak of the glory of the LORD enduring forever. He knew of the angels in heaven that worshipped Him. He looked forward to living forever in God's glorious presence.

Yet, to us, He has revealed so much more! Paul tells us in Ephesians 2 that God "raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order"—are you ready for this!—"that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in his kindness to us (who by our sinful nature deserve only His wrath, not His mercy!) in Christ Jesus.

In Ephesians 3, Paul tells us that already He has not done this only to show to US, God's people, the riches of his grace. But even more astounding, that even now, through God's people, the Church, He is making known to the "rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, His manifold wisdom in saving us and adopting us as His people through Christ.

Wow! Think! God is using the saints in the land—you and me—to display His glory in the great spiritual realms even now!

Understanding Is Not Enough to Foster Love

I don't know about you but even understanding WHY the saints are glorious and WHY we should delight in them is still not enough to delight in them always, the way God calls us to. I know the weakness and sinfulness of my heart. I've seen the weakness and sinfulness of my husband's heart and of other members of our church. We simply do not have what we need in ourselves to delight as we should. This is a task far above our ability. God is the only one who can do this. And so He does!

Gifts God Gives Us to Keep on Loving His People

1. God has gifted us with His Spirit, helping us from the inside to do all He wants us to do.

> "For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose.
> Philippians 2:13

What we can never do in our own power, God's Holy Spirit works in our hearts. The fruit of the Spirit changes us and helps us persevere with each other.

2. God has gifted us with an intercessor, in His Son.

> "Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, since he always lives to intercede for them." (Hebrews 7:25).

Jesus is constantly praying for us to be transformed into His likeness and to will and to act according to His good pleasure.

3. God has gifted us with His sure promises of all the help we will need.

> "His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." 2 Peter 1:3

We are weak, but He is strong! All the strength we need to fulfill His plans He has promised us through knowing Him. He called us. He saved us. He will always provide for us. It is for our good, but also for His glory. He will not fail!

Hail to the Chief!

This is great news for all of God's people, and maybe especially good news for our husbands, called to equip the saints. What a heavy responsibility that can seem at times! It is comforting to remember that God only makes our husbands under shepherds of his flocks. And we, their wives, are like their handmaidens, standing beside them to help. Our husbands are way down the command chain. Our husbands will preach and love and care for the flock as God gives them strength and grace to do so.

But God will always be the chief Shepherd. He will always be the provider and equipper of His people. Our husbands will only ever serve under him. And he promised to never give us more than we can bear and sufficient grace for it all. He is the one who is overall, providing for us all. God makes the plans and God gives the means to fulfill them all! To Him belongs all of the glory and all of our praise!

> "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." – Philippian 1:6

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

Sheep Bites: How God Uses Them, How to Bear Them, How to Heal Them

"For it is not an enemy who taunts me— then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me— then I could hide from him. But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend."
-- Psalm 55:12-13

Sheep Will Bite
The people in your congregation will hurt each other and they will hurt you. You can count on it. We may all have the Holy Spirit inside at work in us, but on this side of heaven, there will still be a fight with sin going on in all of us, too. Where there's smoke, there's fire. Where there's sin, there's bites.

Why Sheep Bites Hurt So Much
David's words written down as part of Psalm 55 quoted above tell us why sheep bites hurt so much. These hurts are coming from those who we count as friends and have covenanted with as brothers and sisters. They are people we have sought to love and care for. They are people to whom we have opened our hearts and have shared our hopes and our struggles. We thought we could always count on their support and friendship. We thought we would always enjoy each other's fellowship.

Then something happens…
Betrayal… shame… sadness…bitterness… anger… hatred… defensiveness… desire for revenge… isolation… abandonment… despair…fear…denial…shock… disappointment… and deep, deep hurt.

Emotions like these flood in. How do we respond? How do we cope? What do we do? How do we heal? That's what this section is about.

Understanding Sheep Bites
When someone hurts you, it's easy to focus on the hurt. But I've found I tend to respond better if I can remember why they are biting. It's like what you probably do when your kids are acting up. It helps to know if they are sick or tired or if they are just being mean-spirited and rebellious when you respond to their behavior. Someone who is sick or tired probably needs to simply be escorted to bed. But someone who is deliberately being defiant needs discipline. In the same way, the believers in your church (including you and husband, by the way), will sin against each other, but there are often different roots involved. Discerning the root causes can help you respond in the best way to the hurt, help it not hurt so much, and certainly can clarify the path to restoration.

Types of Bites

Here are nine, common sources of sheep bites, seen in Scripture and in many churches.

Not So Sound Doctrine
These are struggles against false teachers and false doctrines that have come up and taken root inside the church, turning the ears and hearts of believers away from essential gospel truths.

Paul addressed the church in Galatia when they faced false teachers like this:

> "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are

> throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!" --Galatian 1:6-9

People like these false teachers lead naïve sheep away from the truth and they come to distrust, despise or rebel against their godly leaders when presented with their error. Men, like our husbands, have the difficult job of trying to re-teach or remove these false teachers from the congregation in a way that is effective and is winsome.

This rarely happens with an easy "pardon me, I had no idea I had that wrong" mindset. Usually heels dig in, disputes escalate and slander and gossip spreads. Sheep following the false leaders may find it hard to turn away from their teaching. This is the stuff that church divisions are made of. But these are the gospel mountains that our husbands are called to valiantly fight and even "die" on. Lives are at stake here.

Old Man Heart

Sometimes these are struggles that arise as the sinful desires of our hearts collide with each other, as James speaks of in his letter. (James 4:1-3) "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? 2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

These are so prevalent because there is still so much of our old, sinful ways wrestling with our new creation hearts. The final victory has been won by Christ's death on the cross, but the battles within will continue to our last breath. So many battles going on in so many hearts leads to these kinds of skirmishes between believers in even the godliness of people in the best of churches. O, come Lord Jesus, come!

Old Man Moves

Right there next to that "Old Man" heart are "Old Man" moves. These are memories, emotions or habits that come from our former way of life. They have no place in the church as God's people, but we are either blind to them or they are so slow to shift.

The church in Ephesus struggled a lot with this in terms of idolatry, leaving behind sinful lifestyles:

> "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." --Ephesians 4:17-24

The church in Rome struggled a lot with this in terms of prejudice based on cultural heritage:

> "Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes…. For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." --Romans 10:4,12-13

We are to put aside these former ways, but it is hard; and in the process, we often hurt each other, intentionally or unintentionally. At our church, we have especially seen this in learning to recognize and fight again racial prejudice. Even though the issue at our church is rarely (if ever, during our time here?) what might be seen as outright prejudice, there has been so much to learn about blind spots from growing up as part of the white majority. In some settings, there is overt prejudice to overcome. In all settings, there is so much to ask, discuss, and learn from our minority brothers and sisters so that we might change and grow up together in unity into Jesus Christ, our head.

Just a Sheep

Other times, the struggles come from basic, sheeply fear, ignorance or immaturity. They desire the wrong things. They are easily distracted and prone to wander. They react poorly. Their actions may be hurtful, but they come not so much out of malice, just their spiritual "age."

"So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. (1 Peter 2:2)

"In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:12-14)

It can be hard to learn to trust even godly leaders, especially for new Christians. It may take a lot of time and a lot of patient teaching and love to help these newer sheep grow up and out of their fears and immaturity.

I Just Don't Get It

The beauty of having pastors/elders is that they care for the sheep. The sheep recognize them as the godly leaders God have given for their benefit and they choose to entrust their spiritual well-being into the hands of these men. The tricky thing about having pastors/elders is that entrusting means trusting them, even when you don't have the whole picture.

Many of the saddest, most hurtful times in ministry here at CHBC have been when the pastors/elders ask the members to trust their recommendation on a church discipline matter and they choose not to divulge all the details out of sensitivity to the person being disciplined. To the members, the elders might look like they are jumping the gun or over-disciplining, but if they knew more, they would completely understand. Instead of remembering how trustworthy the elders have been in the past and apply that trust to this situation, they choose to distrust and even defame them.

The elders know that the sheep are reacting because they don't know everything there is to know. They COULD share more information in these tender situations to legitimize their counsel, but they decide to ask the members to trust them rather than sharing even more details that would cause further hurt to a member who is already struggling. (I don't mean that elders are supposed to cover up sin that should be exposed, only extra details that are better not to share more broadly than necessary. Sometimes, additional private conversations with individual members who are especially upset can be helpful here.)

Not Quite Ready for Prime-Time Leadership

Pastoring is a big job. So many people who you want to care for so well. So many decisions to make. So much counsel to give. No wonder a plurality of elders is the biblical model of healthy leadership for a local church!

But sometimes, a pastor and a church can be a bit too quick to call someone to be an elder. Perhaps they are a bit too immature, but are the best you have on hand, so they are voted into leadership. In other cases, your husband is called to a church that has men in leadership that probably should have never been recognized in the first place. Or, your church is in the process of acknowledging its first set of elders and puts no term limits on their service (our elders serve for a 3-year term.)

No matter which way the men came into leadership, the problems start as you begin to make decisions together. Unity is evasive. Discussions become heated. Decisions become difficult. Sometimes factions grow as church members take sides with different leaders, sometimes even turning into church splits. With no term limits in place, there will be no rolling off and coming to a fresh, more unified start. I have heard this story over and over and over.

1 Timothy 3:6 and Paul's qualification for elders alludes to difficulties with asking someone not yet ready for leadership:

> "He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil."

Building Good Bones

Some of the biggest and most important struggles your husband may have to pastor your church through have to do with the biblical foundations that build a healthy church. My husband has grouped these together in what you may have heard called the "Nine Marks of a Healthy Church."

Here they are:

- Biblical Marks of Becoming God's People: The Gospel and Conversion, Evangelism and Missions
- Biblical Marks of Gathering as God's People: Church Membership, Exposition Preaching, Prayer
- Biblical Marks of Maturing as God's People: Biblical Theology, Discipleship, Church Discipline
- Biblical Marks of Shepherding God's People: Biblical Leadership

While these foundations are for the good of God's people and the glory of God, they sure have a way of drawing swords and shedding blood. Change is rarely easy, especially when it challenges long-held practices. There are certainly ways to bring about change too quickly and insensitively.

Even when change is introduced wisely and patiently, it almost always comes with difficulty and pain. Having experienced that myself, my heart goes out to any of you facing that now. But listen: these foundations are what I call the mountains worth crying and dying on. They can bring deep spiritual health to your church. God sees your sacrifice and pain. He will use your husband's good efforts for your church! Pray for your husband and the other church leaders to persevere in this crucial, life-giving work for your church.

If you want to know more about these Biblical foundations, I've added a section focusing on each and why they each are so important to the biblical health of your church. I find that reminding myself of why each is so important helps me to pray better for our church and to encourage my husband when he faces difficulties regarding them.

All the Gray Stuff

Essentials and distinctives. God's law and freedom in Christ. There are certain things in Scripture that we know we must agree upon. Take a look back at your church's Statement of Faith and Church Covenant. I know as you read them, you may feel like there's a lot of good old black and white we are promising

together. And there is. But as soon as you start to live it out, there turns out to be a lot more gray than you might have first imagined, both within those two statements and even more, outside of them.

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Here are only a few examples of feeling the gray:

- Can Christians drink? Can they smoke?
- Under what conditions can Christians divorce and remarry?
- Can women pray in front of the congregation?
- Can women be deaconesses or is Scripture only talking about the wives of deacons?
- Should women with young children have jobs outside of the home and put their kids in day care?
- Should Christians vote for one political candidate based only on his views on gender or abortion?
- Does raising my child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord mean I must homeschool them?
- Is courtship the only biblical model for finding a husband or wife?
- Should you wait to baptize young children who confess Christ or should you immediately baptize them and bring them into the Lord's Supper and church membership?

These are only a view of the often highly charged currents of differing opinions that might run through your church membership, and even between your elders/pastors. They certainly do in ours, here in the nation's capitol—a city already full of strongly-held, differing opinions.

Paul writes to the Corinthian church about just such issues:

> "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall." --1 Corinthians 8:9-13

The path to agreeing on essentials and respecting each other on distinctives (areas of Christian freedom) is the difficult dance that unity must learn. Practicing that dance together may bring hurt as we step on each other's hearts and closely held ideals, but it is also how we learn how to hold our convictions, while being respectful and loving towards others.

The Enemy's Schemes

Don't ever forget it: the church as an enemy. Satan hates God and His good plans. He tempted Adam, and Adam fell. He tempted Christ, but Christ stood firm. Satan's head was crushed when Christ offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. One day Satan will be put away forever along with sin and

death. But for now, there's still vicious strife between him and God and we, as Christ's beloved, are in his crosshairs. He loves to mar the church. He longs to bring her shame and to ruin. Sisters, we are at war.

> "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"
> -- Ephesians 6:12

> "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings."--1 Peter 5:8-9

We have an enemy who delights when we fight against our flesh and blood Christian brothers and sisters. He wants to make the most of our struggles with sin in order to dishonor God's name.

To foil this enemy, to love God's people and to uphold His name, we fight to love well even in our hurts.

Let's next take a look at how we can do this.

Sheep Bite Triage: Some Ways to Help Your Hurts

Sheep bites are coming (or may have already come). Where do we go for first aid? Remember those chapters on godliness? I hope you thought they were important when you read them. But it's in times of trials that you really see how dependent we are upon God to help our husbands and us to act worthy of the gospel. Here are some of the ways that godliness—that is, knowing God and seeking to grow like Christ—will be the life-preserver God uses to help you through, to heal, and even to bring good out of even the hardest trials. We do not have in ourselves what we need to keep on loving God's people or giving them what they need even in adversity. We need God, His Word and His people to help us.

1. Feed on God's Word

We need God's Word to reveal not just the sins of others, but our own sin, as we act or react to difficult situations. We need to receive God's wisdom to know how best to respond and how for our husbands to best lead through the circumstance for the good of God's people and for God's glory. And they will God's Word to strengthen them to carry out that wisdom in a way that honors Him. And we will need God's Word to remind us of God's perspective on His sinful people: He WILL transform them. He IS in control. He DOES care for His Church. Satan and sin will NOT WIN. God WILL!

Focus Feeding

Meditate on passages that apply to situations like yours and how the church dealt with them. Ask God to help your husband (and you) apply these truths to your situation. Meditate on passages, like the one above from Psalm 55, that bring God's comfort, or, that help you see where you are sinfully responding to it and need help to change.

Story Feeding

Read stories of God's faithfulness in difficult situations, especially if there are situations like the one your church is going through. Take hope that the same God who helped his saints of old is alive and well to help his saints today. Pray that be the case! Re-read the difficulties Jesus endured. We have a great high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses and knew what it was to be disowned, defamed, betrayed and even killed by the very ones He came to save. Thank Jesus for what He suffered for us. Ask Him to help you and your husband and your church in your hour of need!

Sermon Feeding

Listen to sermons from other preachers that encourage your heart to keep on loving God's people and that might give your husband/you wisdom to how to deal with your situation.

Repeat Feedings

Do not be discouraged if you have to run back to Scripture again and again for help and for hope. God sometimes grows things quickly; but usually, He grows them slowly and steadily. This is especially the case wounds from church members which often hurt so deeply and often aren't simple, one-time events, but drawn-out issues. Deep physical wounds take longer to heal. So do deep emotional and spiritual wounds.

Food as Medicine

The church has often been described as a hospital for sick and dying souls come to God for healing salvation. Jesus Himself seems to agree: "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mark 2:17, NIV)

I don't know what your church is like, but this certainly seems to be an appropriate description of everyone in ours, including myself. We have all come to Jesus for salvation; and, we all have diseases of the soul that infect both ourselves and all too easily spread to others.

While we all need to be careful about spreading "infections of the heart" to each other, perhaps as the wives of God's junior physicians, we are exposed to more contagion than most. Do you recognize any of these?

- discouragement from news of a member's failed struggle with a long-standing sin
- defensiveness or spitefulness in response to criticisms of your husband, both deserved and undeserved
- self-pity during another lonely week at home due to an unusual work load
- discontentment with elements in our situation; and
- guilt over failure to support my husband as he needs you to and you desire to, yet again

This is just a piece of the parade of usual suspects that I bump into. How about you?

Remembering God's Word and the truths contained in it has been like a wonderful antibiotic in daily germ warfare. I notice that I am much quicker to identify the heart issues and apply God's truth to them more effectively. They help me to identify disobedient thoughts, confess them to the Lord for what they are, ask for His forgiveness, and the strength to turn away and love.

2. Pray for More

God is the one who has everything we need for life and godliness… not US! And not any of the other saints in your church! We must all go to Him over and over and over to give us what we need. We will need strength to endure. Strength to forgive. Strength to extend more grace and 1 Corinthians 13 love. If there will be unity, it will be because God gives it. If good is to come from the suffering these trials bring, it will be because God gives it.

Pray Persistently

There have been times when the wounds of a fellow church member have been so deep that I've thought I could never overcome the rising hatred in my heart. But through persistent prayer, over many months, God reshaped my heart and gave me not only forgiveness, but even affection for that member. Do NOT feel helpless if there's "nothing you can do but pray"! Do not be discouraged if heart changes is slow. God

is willing, able and at work. And I can guarantee that not only will He help you with your difficulty, but He will change you through it!

Pray Especially for Your Husband's Heart
Pray for your husband's heart not to hold on to bitterness against any fellow member. Our husbands hopefully are blessed with the congregation of encouragers. (My husband certainly is here at CHBC!) But even the most encouraging congregation is also a congregation of sinners. And that means that there may be many occasions, even every day, where our pastor-husbands are once more wading in the sins of others.

Sometimes, this is listening empathetically as others humbly confess their sins and turn to the Lord in repentance. But unfortuntely, there are many times when it is the hard work of helping people see their sin and urging them towards repentance, and they don't like that.

"Be prepared to disappoint somebody, my husband always says. Keep your eyes on the Lord and be faithful to love him and to care for the sheep. If you have to please everyone the ministry is the wrong place for you." That's why it's so good for you to spend time praying for your husband that he would be encouraged and he would persevere in loving the flock, even when they take to biting him.

3. Be Careful of the Bitterness Triangle
I'm sure you've heard of something called a love triangle. One man loved by two women, which one will win him? Many a story has been based on that formula. But among pastors' wives, it's not so much a love triangle as a bitterness triangle that is a common paradigm. This happens when we hear about a difficult situation between our husband and another member which they resolved but which we become embittered at the other member about. But because the other member never had a disagreement with us or hurt us directly, there's no natural path to correct the offense. And what builds up instead is bitterness, resentfulness, unforgiveness, and hardness of heart.

This has been one of the most frequent ways I have seen sin creep into my heart and take hold. Sometimes it's enough to know that my husband and his other person has been reconciled. But all too many times, I've had to awkwardly go and speak to that person to bring peace between us. Time spent in God's word and in prayer has been the way the Lord has given me grace to care more about restoring unity than embarrassingly admit that I've been holding a grudge.

Over the years, Mark and I have learned that he needs to be very selective in what disagreements he tells me about so that this bitterness triangle does not arise. Sometimes he needs to find another elder or pastor to de-brief and pray with him over these kinds of circumstances. I'm a good support for some situations. Fellow leaders might be better for others.

4. Take the Lord's Supper Seriously
Our church celebrates the Lord's Supper together on the first Sunday of every month. So, on the last Sunday of every month, whoever is leading the service reminds the members of the Lord's Supper is coming the next week and encourages them to restore any relationships between each other that need mending. This is a biblical mandate. And it's a wonderful way to examine your heart by the month, if not more frequently, of any hardness in your heart towards other members.

We actually read through the church covenant together before we take the Lord's Supper, reminding us of the promises we've made to love each other. The seven days between the last Sunday in the month and the first Sunday when we take the Lord's supper is a great week to pray for the Holy Spirit to bring

unity to the membership by confessing sin and forgiving each other. If your church has a church covenant, you can use it to pray for the Holy Spirit to bring unity in light of those specific promises you've made to each other.

5. Find Someone to Talk To
When we are hurt, it is so helpful to have a godly person to talk to in addition to our husband. Depending on how widespread the issue is in the church, it might mean finding a fellow pastor's wife or other mature, godly woman at a different church to talk to. It can even be over the phone. Fight the temptation to slander or overstate your side. Use your friend as someone who can show compassion, give advice, pray for you, help confirm your point of view, show you your sin or blind spots and hold you accountable.

Encourage and pray for your husband to have wise advisers and supportive prayer warriors, too. These may be found among the elders or other godly men in your church, or pastors at other churches. Nine times out of ten, someone has dealt with that they are going through and can be a huge help. There is nothing new under the sun, just different actors in the cast.

6. Remember the Gospel
We are all in need of the gospel, all the time. Only Christ is a saint of his own standing. Only he is truly "qadoshim:" a holy one. It is only his standing given to us as His free gift to all who repent and put their faith in Him that makes us holy. His work alone sets us apart to enjoy a special relationship with God and to be used in His service. He makes us glorious. His Spirit brings the only spiritual life and transformation, the only reflection of God's character, that will ever touch our lives. The gospel is for us all.

We Never Outgrow the Gospel
While once saved, always saved is a wonderful truth, it is not only in that first hearing and receiving God's good news that we need the gospel. Unfortunately, repentance from sin is a daily necessity. Praise God, we can go back to Him again and again and ask for forgiveness.

Confess And Be Cleaned
It will be easy to see times when church members have wronged you or your husband, but there will be times when you wrong them, even if it is only in the way you respond sinfully to how they have treated you! The good news is that there is forgiveness for me…and for you, if you are struggling like I do with not delighting in the saints as God calls us to do. "If we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9

Are you struggling with bitterness against saints in your church who have mistreated your husband? Are you holding a grudge against someone for voicing his doubts about your husband's good motives in a humiliating way in front of everyone in a member's meeting? Have you struggled with hateful thoughts against others who never seem to be pleased with what your husband does?

Have you adopted a mask of fake sweetness to protect yourself from being really known by others and possibly criticized for your imperfections? Do you gossip with your friends or among other pastor's wives about the short fallings of others in your congregation, when instead you should either speak to the person or leave the issue as a personal matter of prayer?

Turning to yourself: Are you weighed down with guilt or wonder if you should stop doing something good for the church when you know you are plagued with mixed motives?

Confess these things to God. They are sin. Perhaps others have sinned against you or your husband, but

God will hold you accountable for how you react to what they have done. Praise God we have a Savior who has paid for all our sins! We need Him!

Put Yourself in the Same Box

When someone has hurt me or my husband--especially if it's in a way or an extent that I can't imagine myself hurting someone—it's easy for me to put them in a "bad person" box and me in a "good person" box. That attitude will make it very difficult for me to do anything but judge that other person.

I've found it important for me to recognize when I've drawn that kind of box and go back to the gospel. The gospel puts both of us in the "bad person" box. Yes, perhaps I wouldn't do what that other person did or say what they said, but there's plenty of other things that I would do or say that are enough for me to never deserve anything but God's punishment. The gospel box helps me begin to see that person as not so different from me and begins a thaw in my hard heart that God can use to foster mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Remember What the Gospel Does

The gospel is the power to save and to change! It is even powerful enough to work good in whatever crisis your husband might be dealing with, and you are trying to cope with and support him through it. I'm not saying that the gospel works like instant mash potatoes—just add water to the flakes and poof you get mashed potatoes (what a weird food!). But I am saying that the gospel is the power of God and it is at work, according to His perfect timing, to do all that He transforming He plans to do in His people. Transforming to be unified. Transforming to love each other. Transforming to be the bride of Christ. Even as we are hurt or even as we hurt others, we can hope that God can help us. Hope, not despair. That's what God holds out to us in the gospel.

> "He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me." (Colossians 1:28-29, NIV)

> "For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." -- Ephesians 1:15-23

Is That It?

I wish I could say there is a magic pill to heal your hurting heart or protect you, your husband and your church from future sheep trials, but I can't. But what I can say is that you can never over-trust God.

And, as Elizabeth Elliot says, "Suffering is never for nothing." This next section on the delighting in the saints takes a look at God's blessings to us through a life of tending sheep, both in difficult and good times.

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

Sheep Blessings

"He has made everything beautiful in its time." Ecclesiastes 3:11, ESV

"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." --1 Corinthians 15:58, CSB

"Your labor in the Lord is not in vain." There are few words that are more encouraging to people who give their lives to the ministry, like our husbands and ourselves. But is it really true? Is it all worth it? 40+years of ministry certainly has made a believer out of me! Not only has He richly blessed our church and our family in many ways, but He has turned every trial into gold. I'd like to share with you some of both.

Blessing upon Blessing

1. Marriage Partners in the Gospel

Every Christian married couple are partners in the gospel, but being marriage partners in ministry has made the need for that partnership even more necessary and richer. It can be sobering to realize that your marriage and family are to provide godly examples for other church members.

It can be humbling as you see them learning as much from your struggles as your strengths. But it is an added incentive to keep on loving each other and to work through your difficulties. And, doing so in front of church members makes it not only a blessing to your own family, but to so many others. They get to see how God takes two sinful, very different individuals, with their own desires, strengths and weaknesses be unified by their love for God.

They get to watch God transform you increasingly into a picture of Christ with His bride, the Church. Watching that miracle unfold in you gives them hope that the same God who gives grace to your marriage can give grace to theirs.

2. Tethered to the Teacher

No one in a classroom is taught more than the teacher. No one is preached to more than the preacher.

As our husbands spent time preparing to preach, to teach a Sunday School class, to counsel a member on a difficult situation, or to comfort them as they suffer, they grow in God's Word. That regular, intense study time will not only be used by the Lord in the lives of those they pastor, but also in their lives and in their families' lives.

We, too, as many come to us for counsel and comfort, will have many opportunities to study God's Word deeply for His answers to their situation and find what we need not only to help them, but treasure for our own souls, too. Being married to the ministry has brought us both a greater appreciation and knowledge of the riches in God's Word.

3. The Prayers and Comfort of the Saints

Sometimes I dread the scrutiny of being married to the pastor. There was one Sunday when I was sitting all the way in the back of the balcony, about as opposite of a location to center stage as you can get in our church. Mark made a comment about me in his sermon and suddenly most of the congregation rubber-necked to look back at me to see my response. I couldn't believe it! It's at times like these that I'm reminded that many members are mindful not just of Mark, but of me and the rest of the family.

While those incidences are not my favorite version of congregational mindfulness, I have to say that they have been far outweighed by the mindfulness of our members to pray for our whole family. Rarely a Sunday passes when someone doesn't come up to me and tell me that they are praying for us as a family. Some even continue to pray for our children who have married and moved away long ago.

On top of that, many pray regularly for Mark to pastor well and to preach well. We feel so pampered, and Mark feels so empowered by the prayers of the saints! And if that weren't enough, their words of comfort and acts of kindness that have encouraged and sustained us through many hard times. Oh, how beautiful it is when the saints love one another! And what a blessing it is that God turns scrutiny into a blessing for pastors and their families.

4. Sweet Friendships

Pastors and their wives might have to be careful with whom they make deep friendships, but when those friends are found, they are such a blessing. Some of our good friendships have come from the church members. Many have come from the men and their wives who pastor/elder alongside us. Covenanting together to love each other, ministering together for the gospel, encouraging one another to grow in Christ, and even suffering together for His name has forged strong bonds.

I have no doubt that God would have provided friendships for my husband and I if he wasn't in the ministry; but I also do not doubt that working alongside others in the ministry itself has been an important part of the blessing of friendships that we have both enjoyed.

5. Adopted Family

God's people have been adopted family to us. We have had older, godly couples be like parents and grandparents to us. Years after they have departed this life, their wisdom cheers us on. We have had the blessing of being adopted parents to many here in our church. Part of our Church Covenant is a promise to help each other raise up "those in our care" (i.e., children, etc) in the nourish and admonition of the Lord.

We have had the blessing of especially young adult men and women become like older brothers and sisters to our kids. Many of them have no family in the area and are happy to be included into part of our family. They have added so much to our life. And, they have been great friends to our kids, providing another close-up picture of what it means to follow Christ, in addition to good ole Mom and Dad. In Christ, we truly have not failed to receive a hundredfold of brothers, sisters, mother, father, and children as we have given our lives for the gospel. (Mark 10:30)

Bites Turned into Blessings

The suffering we go through in the ministry can be excruciating. The people who hurt us can be the very ones we thought would always be our friends and always be supporters. Now we feel betrayed or abandoned. We can feel so alone, so unappreciated. So unwanted! A heavy darkness settles in our hearts. It can be tempting to give up. But take courage! God knows and cares and is up to good! Your weak little eyes cannot see what God can see in the dark and what good He plans to do through it.

But as John Piper once said, "God is up to 1000 things at once. We might know about 3 of them." Our God is so good and really does work all things together for our good. No hurt or even evil can stand untransformed by Him. With every sheep bite, He intertwines blessings. He even turns them into blessings. God has not failed to make the very things that hurt the most, some of the times of sweetest blessing, with the Lord, with each other, and with those who supported us through them.

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Romans 8 and Sheep Bites

> "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be[i] against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,
>
> "For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
> we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."
>
> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." –Romans 8:28-39

Paul is writing this letter to the Romans to encourage them to persevere even in the face of persecution from enemies of Christ. The tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword he is talking about are brought by those outside of the church, not fellow Christians. But as Paul, himself, faced from time to time, there are hurts and sin struggles within the church, too. And we can at very least speak of the good God used these difficulties to do: to give billions of Christians over thousands of years much of the New Testament Scriptures to live by and to know how to even be a church!

So, yes, I am hijacking the promises of this passage for other applications. But that beautiful phrase "all things work together of the good" leaves no situation out. God will even use our struggles with sheep in the church for our good, their good, and God's glory.

So, on we go!

1. We may feel the weight of sin and suffering of God's people more, but God uses it to grow our love for God and tenderness for God's people.

When I asked my husband what is the hardest thing he regularly deals with in our local church, he said helping them day after day with grief and loss. Death, cancer diagnoses, job loss, divorce, miscarriage, friends moving away. Most every day of every week brings sadness of this kind. This might not seem like a sheep bite, because our husbands aren't a target with this kind of mourning and grief. But it is like a bite because of all of the pain involved.

Pastors/elders feel the breadth of the sin of the people in their church because they spend so much time caring for and checking up on them. And being sinners as we all are, and living in a fallen world as we do, there is always someone (and usually multiple somebodies) who is struggling. Our shepherd husbands make it their job to know their sheep's struggles and pastor them through them.

My husband and I are not a "share all" ministry couple. There are many things that I do not know that others are struggling with. Shepherding ME well has helped us come to see my "weight" limits. There are some things my husband shares with me, some things I know from my own interactions with people and attendance in church gatherings, and there are a lot of things I do not know. Every camel can bear a certain amount of burden, and my big husband camel has a lot more capacity than me. But there are times when I get a fuller sense of how much he bears and am amazed that he can do it. There is so much sin, hurt and brokenness in just our congregation alone!

But with the burden-bearing has come a deeper love for God and for His people. God hears the prayers of all His hurting people, every moment of every day. He welcomes them to cast their burdens upon Him because He cares for them. And God doesn't merely hear them and bear them as a listener. He sent His Son to bear the full weight of it all so that we might be free!

> "Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed." --Isaiah 53:4-5

> "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" --1 John 3:1, NIV

Helping others through their sorrows tenderizes our hearts towards them. When I think of how tender my husband's heart is in counselling and in preaching now compared to his early years, the change is remarkable. Sharing sorrows year after year, have made him more like the compassionate shepherd and the sympathetic high priest. That has made him a better husband to me and father to our kids, as well as a more winsome pastor to the congregation. What a blessing!

> "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort. " --2 Corinthians 1:3-7

2. We feel our weakness to lead and love, but we learn to depend upon the Lord to grow and help His church and wait for His timing in contentment.

Most men like to fix things, or at least my husband does. But unfortunately, many of the concerns people share with him can't be easily fixed by a simple word or action. Quickly, he comes to the end of himself. A pastor spends much of his day listening to people and problems that can't be easily fixed. Being in ministry is a sure-fire way to see how little you can do. That can be very discouraging, especially if your husband thought he was going into the ministry to rescue the world, or at least one little corner of it.

But the blessing of coming to the end of yourself is seeing just how dependent we are upon God. Being

faced with their inadequacy and finding God alone what is needed is great for our humility and great for our vision of how big God is. As men who regularly face their limits and must go to God and ask Him to do what they cannot do, our husbands have a great opportunity to grow their confidence in God. And this, in turn, blesses the whole congregation as their pastors comfort them with the ability of God to be enough for their circumstances.

This clinging to God as the source instead of the means of His grace is especially important for us as pastor's wives. There are many times we may be tempted to push our husbands to fix this church situation or to do more with that troubled member. We may be impatient for changes in our church and expect our husbands to be the ones to change it and change it now. While we certainly want to encourage our husbands to say or do the difficult things that need to be done in love, we need to be careful that we are not really pushing for them to rush imprudently into change because we are impatient with God's timing. Like David, we need to be praying about these situations, both for God to work out changes in His perfect timing and by whatever means He chooses—using our husbands or not, as the case may be.

Reflecting on this also helps me to rightly rely first on the Lord, rather than on my husband. I know my husband is not Superman, if for no other reason than I don't think he has ever owned any spandex, and certainly not in red and blue with a matching cape! But, sometimes my expectations of what he can do for me, look like I think he is "faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, and "able of leaping tall buildings in a single bound."

On my list of expected superhuman feats for my husband have been things like: converting our children, never making mistakes; making everyone in the congregation happy; be in all places at all time; write sermons without hours of study; protect me from all hurtful remarks or actions of others; fill all of the needs and wants of my heart; or at very least, reading my mind. A healthy admiration of our husband's abilities is one thing, but superhuman expectations are another! They are sinners like us! They need God's grace to do all that God requires them to do. They are God's good gift to the church. They are God's good gift to us and our children. But they are not a replacement for God!

I have found that taking time to remember God's truth satisfies my heart upon God rather than trying to squeeze God-sized comfort from my human-sized husband. It also helps me look to God as the one who works salvation and sanctification in His church by His Holy Spirit and His Word, rather than on the works of my husband. This puts me in a position of contentment in God that allows me to love, encourage and be grateful for my husband, rather than find him lacking most of the time.

Most pastors deal with feelings of impatience to see certain situations or people would change. Sometimes this may tempt them to say or do things rashly in an attempt to affect a change now! Sometimes God may make this attitude a bit clearer to us than it is to them. God very well may desire to use a gentle, winsome, humble word from us to help them to turn away from acting rashly and to turn back and depend upon God and His timing. Carolyn Mahaney's talk called "Watch Your Man," available online is a great resource for learning how to do this.

Our husbands and we are far from the only ones facing the temptation to hurry along a particular outcome to a long-standing problem. There will likely be many times when we will need to offer the same kind of gentle, humble winsome reminder we might offer our husbands to others in our church. We can pray with them for change in the situation but point them back to trusting God's timing and leading in changing the situation.

3. We see the power of sin in God's people, but we get a front row seat of the great things God is doing.

You know the fairy tale of the ugly duckling that turns out to be a swan? That isn't anything compared to the radical changes God brings about in each of His people!

Saved. Made New. Redeemed. Transformed. Conformed. And one day GLORIOUS! These are the powerful verbs God's Word uses to describe what He does in His people. God changes us by His Spirit at work in us. And it's the church that is the stage for seeing these amazing changes.

Now that DOES mean that there's a lot of ugly walking down our hallways. We are all sinners and while salvation comes instantly, sanctification comes slowly. Sometimes those ugly ducks do ugly, hurtful things; or, just a lot of stupid things (seeing as these ugly ducks are really sheep—animal confusion). And our husbands can get very tired and sometimes very beat up trying to care well for everyone.

But God never fails to bring His work to completion. He has promised transformation, so it will come. And guess who gets to watch His people shed their ugly and be transformed into beauty, over and over again? Our husbands and us alongside them. It is such a blessing to see the power of God at work. It gives such hope in Him. With man, much is impossible. With God, all things are possible.

> "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." --2 Corinthians 3:17-18, ESV

4. We feel loneliness as people come and go, but we get to hug a parade of God's people.

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 away to 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 deeply in each other only to see a for sale sign outside their house a few years later! And not only is it so hard, but it hurts. Every time one of these close friends leaves it's like they take part of my heart with them. That's why my husband came up with the motto that loving one another at CHBC is an invitation to "hug a parade." We make the most of the time we have, but we know that we meet to part all too quickly, 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 so powerful. Good thing he so able. He always gives more grace to go deep and to find good friends again.

But there are blessings to this parade hugging, too! God uses it to expand our ability to love like Him --fully and freely. We get to see God's faithfulness to save and transform person after person after person.

And He the transiency of our friendships to 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!

5. Confronting false doctrine or disunity within the church can bring strife to the congregation and anger towards our husbands, but God grows in us His heart for His glory, His people and the gospel.

> "'And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. Jeremiah 3:18

Some of the most important things our husbands do as pastors is to preserve God's truth and work for the unity within our local church. Without the truth, no one can be saved. Without the truth, we have no understanding to inform our thoughts or our lives as God wants us to. Without unity, the Church's clear witness to Christ and the gospel is blurred. The gospels and the letters of the New Testament are filled pastors/elders being urged to uphold sound doctrine and to work for unity within their churches.

Why do they need to be urged to do these things? Because those in the congregation or trying to influence the congregation with false teaching are putting up a fight or the rifts of disunity are so deep felt. These matters are rarely patched up with a "let's get coffee and clear up our little points of disagreement" appointments. This is laborious work for the sake of the gospel. Oh, but when it is your very own brothers and sisters you are trying to correct or bring to unity, this becomes so painful.

What you might love to say with a gentle word is sometimes only effective with a firm rebuke—no one's favorite form of communication. Correction may be taken as arrogance and the response be hurtful rather than humble. Our husbands may be misjudged and even slandered. On top of being terrible for the church, this is so hard for our husbands and it's so hard for us. My passions flare. My mama bear is roused on my husband's account.

I think it must be my least favorite way to see my husband suffer in the ministry. But God has used these incidents to bless me with an x-ray into my own sinful heart. This heart surgery is so important! He makes me see how much I want the congregation to appreciate him. I look to them rather than look to God for approval. (Galatians 1:5)

I remember that God sees and He will reward my husband's faithfulness, even if it is not appreciated or rewarded here. It reminds me that we give ourselves first to God, then to God's people. And we give ourselves to God's people, because we have given ourselves to God. (2 Corinthians 8:5) And, as God frees us from looking primarily to man's good opinion, He frees us to do what is needed to love them better, even though it might hurt.

> "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. "--1 Peter 5:1-4, NIV

I hope recounting these blessings are an encouragement to you that no matter what your husband and you encounter in the ministry that there is nothing that God cannot and will not use for your good and His glory!

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

Nine Marks of a Healthy Church
(Hills to Thrive on, Cry on, and Die on)

Perhaps you have heard of my husband, Mark. If so, it is very likely because of something called "Nine Marks of a Healthy Church." These are not some new ideas of his, but a cataloging of what God delights in for His people and what He calls them, as the church, to do.

These basic, biblical elements that help churches grow and thrive have been the heart of my husband's shepherding as he has "Preached, Prayed, Loved and Stayed" at Capitol Hill Baptist for over 30 years. Usually, he speaks to pastors about the Nine Marks because they are crucial for their calling of shepherding and equipping the members of their local church.

Why You Should Care about These Biblical Truths
You probably understand why your husband might think these are important in how he shepherds your local church, but did you know that there are very good reasons for you, as pastor's wife, to know and care about these, too. If your church situation turns out to be anything like ours, it is very likely that these are the things he spends hours praying and planning for it that your church might flourish and grow. And when the congregation is thriving, that makes your husband's shepherd heart sing.

Perhaps just as likely, if your husband comes home tired and discouraged, having had a hard day of pastoring, the struggle probably had to do with something to do with an aspect of one of these biblical marks. Or, in the heart-wrenching case that your husband is asked to leave the church, (for a reason other than sin), the root cause will likely somehow be connected to a disagreement over one of these concepts.

Knowing these can help you know the heartbeat of what your husband is called to do, and THAT can make you a better pray-er, better encourager, and better helper to him and lover of the church. And perhaps most of all, they may help you—like they have helped me—understand why there are some "mountains" of biblical truth that are so important to the church that they are worth fighting and even "dying" for. So, let me introduce you to the "Marks", where you find them in the Bible, and why these are so important to what your husband does to delighting in "the saints" in your local church.

Nine, Eleven, or Both?
One last note: you will actually find I've listed 11 Marks but my husband's book is called "Nine Marks of a Healthy Church. What's the deal? Well, basically, he added two additional marks and simply smooshed together four of the original marks into two marks. So, I joke with him and call them the eleven marks and present them as such here. Ha!

I've grouped them by categories:
- Biblical Marks of Becoming God's People: The Gospel and Conversion, Evangelism and Missions
- Biblical Marks of Gathering as God's People: Church Membership, Exposition Preaching, Prayer
- Biblical Marks of Maturing as God's People: Biblical Theology, Discipleship, Church Discipline
- Biblical Marks of Shepherding God's People: Biblical Leadership

The Biblical Marks of Becoming God's People

Mark 1. The Gospel:
God delights in saving sinners. He planned for us to share the good news of Christ that many might be saved.

The gospel is the good news by which we become God's people and in which we continue to find hope as God's people. It is salvation through Jesus for all who repent of their sins and trust in Him as their Savior. The gospel is the foundation of our faith that we build upon and grow upon every day of our lives.

The gospel is:
• GOD: The LORD is the one and only God. He is the creator and king of everything. He is holy and made us in his image to know him, enjoy him and to obey Him. (Genesis 1:26-28).

• MAN: We should obey Him, but we have all chosen to rebel against Him and His good ways. We are cut off from Him. We face His judgment and eternal punishment for our sins. (Genesis 3; Romans 3:23).

• CHRIST: We deserved nothing, yet in His great love, God sent His Son, Jesus, into the world to be our Savior. Fully God, Jesus became a man. He lived the perfect life that we should have lived, fulfilling every bit of God's law. Then on the cross, He offered up His perfect life as the perfect payment for the sins of all those who would ever turn from their sin and trust in Him as their Savior. • Jesus died and was buried that day, but on the third day, He rose again from the dead, showing that God had accepted Christ's sacrifice and God's wrath against our sin was completely satisfied. ((John 1:14; Heb. 7:26; Rom. 3:21-26, 5:12-21). Acts 2:24, Rom. 4:25).

• RESPONSE: Now God calls us to repent of our sins and trust in Christ as our Savior. (Acts 17:30, John 1:12). If we do, God gives us eternal life. He makes us a new person, giving us a new heart filled with His Spirit. (John 3:16). And not just a new person, but part of a new people, His people, He is gathering from every tribe and nation, to be His dearly loved people who will enjoy Him forever. (Matt. 16:15-19; Eph. 2:11-19).

Helpful Bible Verses
The Gospel is the message that saves us:

> And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, -- Ephesians 1:13,NIV

We never outgrow the gospel

> "Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." –1 Corinthians 15:1-4, NIV

How is being careful about the gospel delighting in the saints?
The gospel is the only way any of us can be saved. Only through hearing and receiving this good news we can become God's people, the very saints, in whom God and in whom we are to delight. And, it is the most foundational theology on which most everything the church does flows out from. To get the gospel wrong is to give false hope to dying people.

A clear telling of the gospel is the first and most basic way in which we delight in the saints. That means we need to delight in the saints (or saints-to-be), we must love them by helping them understand the whole gospel so they can make a true decision. The gospel stripped of our sin, makes no understanding of the Savior. The gospel stripped of the new life of repentance, will be a lifeless faith without fruit. That is destructive to the people who think they are saved but aren't. The gospel separated from membership in the church, leads to Christians who should look distinct from the world, but do not.

Mark 2. Conversion:
Conversion: Becoming God's People
God delights in His people becoming new creations.. He planned for us to show true change that reflects His character and, in light of that, give each other assurance of our new life in Christ.

Conversion is the powerful work in which we are made new people in Christ. It is the biblical understanding about how we become God's people—both God's part and our part in it. From the Bible we know that because we are dead in our sins, God must act to bring us to live by the work of His Holy Spirit through His Word, the Bible. He is the one who gives us the gifts of understanding, of faith to believe, and the ability to turn away from our sins and live for Him. People must receive the gospel, repent of their sins and trust in Jesus as their Savior.

Helpful Bible Verses:
God brings us to spiritual life:

> All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

God gives us repentance and faith to believe

> "He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Acts 5:31, NIV

> "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" Romans 2:4,NIV

What we do in conversion:
Repent of our sins and believe in Jesus

> "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" – Mark 1:15,NIV

Looking for signs of conversion

> "Be on your guard against false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves. 16 You'll recognize them by their fruit. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a bad tree produces bad fruit. 18 A good tree can't produce bad fruit; neither can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So you'll recognize them by their fruit." --Matthew 7:15-20

> "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves. Or do you yourselves not recognize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless you fail the test. And I hope you will recognize that we ourselves do not fail the test." --2 Corinthians 13:5-6

How is Being Careful about Conversion Delighting in the Saints?

Conversion is the sign that someone has truly become one of God's people. And, while, only God can truly know hearts, we can expect to see fruit in keeping with repentance in those who have been made new in Christ.

When this fruit is missing, it is our opportunity to humbly revisit the gospel with someone who claims to be a Christian. We do them no good to stay quiet when their very eternity may be at stake! When this fruit is missing after we share the gospel with, it is an opportunity to patiently keep praying and waiting Conversion is the sign that someone has truly become one of God's people. And, while, only God can truly know hearts, we can expect to see fruit in keeping with repentance in those who have been made new in Christ.

When this fruit is missing, it is our opportunity to humbly revisit the gospel with someone who claims to be a Christian. We do them no good to stay quiet when their very eternity may be at stake! When this fruit is missing after we share the gospel with, it is an opportunity to patiently keep praying and waiting upon the Lord for His work in an individual's heart. Manipulation will not bring anyone to saving faith in Christ; but it can lead to false conversion and false sense of assurance that make it more difficult for someone to their need for salvation.

But, when this fruit is present, it is what makes us, as individuals, shine like lights to the world and points others to God. And, it is this fruit in us, as a people gathering together, committing themselves to worship God and love one another together, that make the church look like the distinctly different people of God they are meant to be.

Side note: An implication of this mark is to reserve baptism for those who clearly are bearing the fruit of conversion. This is often a very tricky point for those considering the baptism of children. We have personally known many pastors who have "fought" and "died" on this mountain, as they have expressed the prudence of waiting until a young child is a bit older, and the fruit of salvation can be recognized more generally by the congregation before they are baptized.

It may be felt by parent or child as an attack on the legitimacy of the child's profession, but it is meant for the good of the child and the church. It stems from years of stories of early baptisms and false conversions, then "re-baptisms" in high school or college when as a teenager, the child feels the tug of the world, and chooses Jesus and experiences what they admit is true conversion.

In case this is new to you, it's not saying young children can't become Christians. But the idea, as the historical church held for years, that we can encourage young children in their faith, while waiting a bit later for a consistent life of fruit, so as not to confuse them and for the clarity of the witness of the church. Pray for your husbands to make good decisions in this tricky area for the good of the children, the parents, and the church.

Michael Lawrence has an excellent article on this: https://www.9marks.org/article/give-them-time-how-to-protect-the-assuring-nature-of-a-childs-baptism/

Mark 3. Evangelism

God delights in growing His family. He planned for us to take the gospel to others.

Evangelism comes from the word meaning to tell the good news. That is exactly what it is: sharing the gospel, the good news of salvation through Jesus, with others, that they might repent of their sins and trust in Jesus as their Savior. It is urging them to repent of their sins and believe in Him that they might be saved. It is telling them that they deserve God's punishment for their sins yet can receive God's mercy and love. It is helping them understand that repentance means turning away from an old way of life and turning to God to live His way. Faith will be joined with fruit.

Each person must make their own, personal response to the gospel, but that is just the beginning. God saves individuals not to live as isolated individuals, but to be a part of His people, the Church. An important part of evangelism is folding new believers into a local church where they can grow up in Christ and build up one another.

Helpful Bible Verses

Ambassadors for Christ

> "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 ESV

Be Ready to Share

> "But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."
> – – 1 Peter 3:15

Why is evangelism delighting in the saints?

God has ordained that it is through our sharing the gospel with people that they will be saved. This makes evangelism the first, necessary step in anyone becoming one of God's people and growing up into Christ as His disciple. If we delight in there being saints, we will share the gospel as God has planned for us to. How will they hear and respond, if no one shares with them?

But it is also important to remember that delighting in the saints means that while God has given us an integral part, we look to Him to act to bring about salvation. Our evangelism should not be manipulative. It is God who grows the seeds of His Word by His Spirit. It is ours to delight by telling and by praying. It is His to delight by bringing to life.

Mark 4. Missions

God delights in including people from every tribe and nation in His family. He planned for us to go to those places and tell them the good news.

From before the beginning, God has planned to call a people to Himself from every tribe and nation. We see in Revelation 21 this plan fulfilled as all God's people are gathered together before God's throne to praise Him and enjoy Him forever. How does God call all these people to Himself? It starts with missions. Missions is taking the good news of Jesus to people in another culture from our own. As they hear the gospel, repent and believe, these new believers form local churches who gather together to worship God and love one another. Together, they grow up in Christ as His disciples.

Helpful Bible Verses:

Called to Go

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." --Matthew 28:19-20

Our Telling Is God's Plan for Others to Be Saved

"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" --Romans 10:14-15

All Nations Will Here Before Jesus Comes Back

This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." --Matthew 24:14

How Is Missions Delighting in the Saints?

Missions is the first, necessary step we must take for people from other lands becoming God's people and growing up into Christ as His disciples. If we delight in there being saints from every tribe and nation, we will be a part of sending or going to these faraway places to tell them the gospel, help them grow as disciples and be established in thriving local churches so they can continue the good work of the gospel within their own country.

And not only that, we also delight in the saints through missions by being a part of bringing the gospel to all nations so that God's plans for this world is completed and He at last brings all of His people to that delightful day when we will all gather around His throne as one people enjoying their wonderful God forever.

II. Biblical Marks of Gathering as God's People

Mark 5. Church Membership: God's People Together

God delights in making us part of His family. He planned for us to commit to each other.
Christians are God's people, the Body of Christ, changed by His Holy Spirit, and who stand distinct from the world. Upon their repentance from sins and profession of faith in Christ, they are baptized and become members of a local church, committing themselves to regularly gather together to help each other worship God and to love one another, under the care of godly leaders.

Helpful Bible Verses about Church Membership:

Church members are those who repent, believe, and are baptized

> "Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Acts 2:38-42

Church members work towards a life of unity in Christ as one body.

> "And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful." Colossians 3:15

The idea of believers in a local church having a special commitment to one another also shows in the way the New Testament churches respond to those who fall into an unrepentant pattern of sin. If there is no special commitment, then there would be no removal of someone from fellowship. (See 1 Corinthians 5)

How Is Caring about Church Membership Delighting in the Saints?

Maybe it sounds exclusive to insiders or snobby to outsiders to require people to join the local church as members. But the focus of church membership, both towards insiders and outsiders, is far more loving than this. To the members inside the church, It is to put stronger arms of care around God's people within the local church, as members commit to love, serve and care for each other with their lives; and, as they welcome their godly leaders to have authority to teach them, lead them and protect them from danger in a way they could not casual attenders. Church membership is the bond formed from the love vows of God's people to each other. Without it, we lose the atmosphere of trust and steadfast love, worthy of Christ's bride, and brothers and sisters in God's family.

Church membership is also very important to our witness to those outside the church. The covenant we make to each other in church membership acts like a spotlight on the glory of God as reflected in His people to brighten the distinctive attractiveness of the gospel. "Jesus said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35.)

God always planned for us to be His people, gathered together here on earth in local churches, committed to each other, and together, reflecting Christ as His body, to the glory of God, for the encouragement of fellow believers, and to the amazement of the world.

Gathering Together to Worship

Local churches are like stages set for the dress rehearsals of the life with God and all His people we will enjoy at the end of time. There, we will gather together forever before His throne, as Christ's bride,

enjoying God and each other fully at last. Church is the incubator of God's plans for His people here on earth. From our local gatherings, God grows us for all the good that He has planned to do through us, and the place where He prepares them for this unfathomable future with Him. Everything else flows out from our commitment to each other in the local church.

That leads us to the next, couple of Marks:

Mark 6. Expositional Preaching
God delights in His people being instructed by His Word. He planned for us to hear His Word regularly read and explained, that we might respond to it together.

"Exposition" is a thorough explanation of an idea. "Expositional preaching" is a sermon that takes a passage of Scripture, considers its main point or points and thoroughly explains it. My husband says expositional preaching answers these three questions in this order: "What does it say?", "What does it mean?" and "What does it mean for us today?". This type of preaching is in contrast to a topical sermon, which is centered around a given topic which is explained by use of many different passages throughout the Bible.

Helpful Bible Verses:

> "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
> -- Colossians 3:16
>
> "They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading." --Nehemiah 8:8
>
> "I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus, who is going to judge the living and the dead, and because of his appearing and his kingdom: Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and teaching. For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear. They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths. For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear what they want to hear." --2 Timothy 4:1-4

Examples of expositional preaching from the New Testament: Luke 24:27, 44; Acts 2:14-41, 13:16-47; Hebrews 3:7-4:13

Why Is Expositional Preaching Delighting in the Saints?
This is the main thing God's people do together, and the main thing God calls us to do together when we gather as a church. God's Word is the rock of our understanding, our faith, and our lives. Expositional preaching builds solid understanding of the Bible in context. God's Word is alive and is powerful to save and transform people.

This verse by verse, passage by passage, approach lets God and His emphasis speak forcefully for itself on whatever subjects are at hand, instead of piecing together what we want it to say, as can easily happen with topical sermons. God promises that His Word never goes out void. It always achieves its purpose. Expositional preaching is the rich food that nourishes God's people to better know God and live for Him even in the darkest trials of life.

Mark 7. Praying Together

God delights in His people's fellowship with Him, together. He planned for us to worship Him together through prayer.

Prayer is foundational to a growing relationship with God. It acknowledges God's greatness and our dependence upon Him. We thank Him for His faithfulness to us and ask Him to continue to provide all we need. God has woven all of our prayers into the unfolding of His sovereign plans, that's why our prayers are so powerful. In Scripture, we see believers having their own private times of prayer, but also praying extensively when they gather together as a local church.

Helpful Bible Verses:

"But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit." --Jude 1:20

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." –John 15:5-8

"Again, truly I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about any matter that you[l] pray for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them." --Matthew 18:19

"So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him." – Acts 12:5, NIV

How Is Praying Together, Delighting in the Saints?

Praying together as a church is something that many have shortened, perhaps out of a desire to keep a service a certain length; or thinking that people will be bored; or sadly, forgetting how much good is done through our prayers together as a church. the importance and the power to act that God has placed within our prayers. And, forgetting that as we pray together, God not only acts, but also teaches us about Himself, reminds us of our utter dependence upon Him, encourages of His power to act as He answers us, and knits our hearts together in unity as we meditate on Him.

III. Gathering Together to Encourage and Build Up One Another

Mark 8. Biblical Theology

God delights in His people becoming like Christ. He planned for us to help each other grow through understanding truths about Him, ourselves, the world, and His plans.

Biblical theology is understanding what God says in His Word about Himself, about His plans and work in the world; and, about how He would have us live. While expositional preaching helps us understand individual Bible passages and how we can apply them to our lives.

Biblical theology creates a framework of truths about God from the whole of Scripture. It is like looking at the many facets of a diamond to appreciate it in its entirety. It starts with the head, but does not end there. Good theology informs our hearts—growing our love for God—and our lives—how to live out that love in lives that please Him.

Helpful Bible Verses:

Biblical truths fill the mind, then flow into our hearts and lives

> "What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us." --2 Timothy 1:13-14

Give us the ability to discern false teaching

> Many deceivers have gone out into the world; they do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves so that you don't lose what we have worked for, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who does not remain in Christ's teaching but goes beyond it does not have God. The one who remains in that teaching, this one has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your home, and do not greet him; for the one who greets him shares in his evil works. –2 John 7-11

Comfort and encourage us in times of suffering

> "[God] comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." –-2 Corinthians 1:4

Why Is Learning Biblical Theology Delighting in the Saints?

To learn biblical theology is to put in your hands God's words of comfort, encouragement, discernment, and perseverance that enlighten and strengthen each other for life. It is how we understand the gospel—how we can be saved; and the basis of our discipleship—how we grow in Christ. It is how we discern lies from false teachers, from the world and from our own, deceitful hearts.

It is how we go on trusting even when life is so hard and the future seems bleak. It is what forms the basis of our unity in truth and informs our worship of God. It impacts every area of the Christian life, personally and as a church. As Martin Luther once said, "Theology is not dry, heady stuff, but how we live and die." And so it is. But I would add: it's not only how we live and die, but how we help each other live and die well, too.

Mark 9: Discipleship

God delights in His people reflecting Him to each other and to the world. He planned for us to help one another mature into Christ, their Head.

The goal of sharing the good news of Jesus with someone is not them simply making a confession of faith but making a change of life. This change of life from our own way of life to God's is called discipleship. It is growing in our knowledge of God and our loving obedience to Him, starting with repentance, belief and baptism when we first become a Christian, and continues the rest of our lives.

While we do grow in knowledge of God and obedience on our own, God's Word shows us that we grow best when we gather together in a local church. We are called the body of Christ—a unit under our head, Jesus Christ. Godly leaders help show us the way God wants us to live. And, as "body parts" we are to work together to help each other grow up in godliness. Everyone is to be a part of encouraging and building up one another.

Helpful Bible Verses:

Encouraging each other to love and live in ways that please God and do the good He wants us to do.

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works." --Hebrews 10:24

Helping others grow where they are

"And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. " --1 Thessalonians 5:14

Confessing our sin to one another

"Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another." --James 5:16

Doing good to one another

"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

Helping each other be the aroma of Christ to the world

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." -- John 13:34-35

Why Discipleship Is Delighting in the Saints?

God means for His people to be transformed into His likeness. We are to be the beautiful bride of Christ, seen to reflect His goodness. This is no easy thing for sinners, like us. We need each other to help us to keep on persevering in becoming like Christ. We need good teaching to help us to rightly understand God's Word and how God wants us to live. We need the examples of others to learn how to fight sin and grow in godliness. We need them to pray, to encourage us, and even to correct us. This is an integral part of how God changes His people. And, when we love each other like this, we not only glorify God, but we show the world what He is like:

Mark 10. Church Discipline

God delights in His people reflecting His holiness, for our good and His glory. He planned for us to help each other fight sin and live holy lives.

In one sense, discipline is simply discipleship. It is teaching by word and by example, as a body of believers gathering or one on one, how to live in a manner worthy of Christ. Taken this way, church discipline is just about everything that members of a church do to help each other grow. This kind of discipline is what I've included under discipleship.

Church discipline, as I'm describing here, is the "church version" of what parents do to correct their children when they disobey. This kind of discipline is loving actions aimed at changing destructive behavior for the good of the one being corrected. Church discipline, in this sense, is loving actions of the church aimed at urging a fellow member away from destructive patterns of sin that put in danger their discipleship, put in question their salvation, put in harm's way others' discipleship, and/or put in derision the pure witness of the church to Christ, its head.

Church discipline starts with conversation and loving warnings, but may very well end with being excluded from the Lord's Supper and even from membership, if no pattern of change ultimately occurs. All of these steps are not done in arrogance or maliciousness, but to help a brother or sister turn to the Lord. It is for their eternal good.

Helpful Bible Verses:

Exhorting each other to not be hardened by sin

> "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. -- Hebrews 3:13
>
> "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, the living Stone… also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." --1 Peter 2:1-5

To help those who are in a pattern of sin to turn back

> "My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins." – James 5:19-20
>
> "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that "every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." --Matt. 18:15–17

To Protect the Purity of the Bride of Christ

> "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless." — Ephesians 5:25-27

Why Is Church Discipline Delighting in the Saints?

No one enjoys being corrected. As Hebrews 12:11 says: "No discipline is pleasant at the time, but painful."

But more important than feeling good about yourself in the moment, is being saved for all eternity. This why Hebrews 12:11 goes on to say, "[discipline] later on, however, …produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

This is one of the most difficult acts of love we will ever be asked to perform. But we do it not only for the good of a brother or sister, but to the glory of God. We want the church to look like the Bride of Christ. We want the church to reflect God's character, both up to Him and out to the world. Without discipline for patterns of sin, we choose to leave off love and distort the picture of God the church was meant to provide.

Mark 11. Godly Leadership

God delights in Christ's bride, the Church, being made ready for eternal life with Him. He planned to use pastor-elders to care and equip us through their shepherding.

We have already talked about this quite a bit in previous talks. Suffice it to say here that God has raised up godly men to lead His people as His under-shepherds. The words "pastors", "elders", "bishops", "shepherd" are all biblical terms used for them. God gives them as gifts to His people to equip them with what they need to carry out the ministry He has given them to grow up one another into maturity in Christ. Like Christ, godly elders honor God by selflessly serving God's people. They are called to Nourish the Church with God's Word. And, furnish a godly example in their lives and in their leadership. And, they are to flourish their families, caring well for them, even as they seek to care well for the church.

Helpful Bible Verses:

> "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." --Ephesians 4:11-13
>
> "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. --1 Peter 5:1-5
>
> "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." --John 10:11

How is Godly Leadership Delighting in the Saints?

How isn't it, is a better question. Like Christ, they take joy when God's people grow and glorify God. And like Christ, they not unfrequently bear a heavy load when God's people hold to sinful and selfish ways. They are the ones who equip God's people to know, carry out, and thrive under the other ten, biblical Marks mentioned above. They are the ones that, like the Good Shepherd, lay down their lives for the sake of God's flock.

These men are our husbands. We know their task well. We know their hearts. We know their hurts and their joys. And one day, we will get to see these men receive a special reward for their sacrifices and their

service. Pray for them as they love Christ and His people, by building biblical, spiritual health into their local gathering. Encourage them as they work, pray, preach, and stay... and sometimes, even cry and "die" on these foundational truths.

CONCLUSION

Don't take my husband's word for it! Journal through the New Testament yourself and I'm pretty sure you will see how these nine/eleven mountains rise up over and over to be the basis of healthy, biblical churches. My hope is that in understanding them, you will be able to better recognize what your husband spends his life doing for the good of the church. And, they can fuel your prayers for him and for your church.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. Were any of these marks surprising to you?
2. Are there any of these that you have seen help your church flourish?
3. Are there any of these that your husband is particularly trying to implement or is experiencing friction over at your church?
4. How does knowing these eleven marks help you better understand what your husband is trying to do at your church and in how you can encourage him in his work?

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 Lords 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 turrns 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 a 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?

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

Bringing Up Difficulties with Your Husband

Abigail: Wise Peacemaker, Virtuous Woman, and Wife
Ok, so Abigail as David's wife is a bit complicated. I don't fully understand the multiple wives, concubines, etc. of some Old Testament heroes of the faith… and I'm not going to address that here. But, the Lord did bless David by this wise woman's humble yet winsome words to make peace in an inflamed situation to avert further and even greater trouble. (1 Samuel 25) It is these qualities that make her a "delightful" saint and someone for us to emulate as pastors' wives.

Being Winsome, Yet Humble
"Always confident; sometimes right," is a quote my husband says of himself. (One intern class even made him a t-shirt with that printed on it.) If that man of mine has nothing else, it is confidence! Over the years I have learned that not only is he sometimes right, he's FREQUENTLY right. In our marriage. With our kids. With our finances. In the church. There have been many times when the next chapter of our lives would have looked very different had I, rather than him, been the head of our household or pastor of our church. I am so grateful for his wise leadership, fueled by intelligence, bathed in prayer, informed by biblical knowledge, undergirded by an unwavering confidence in the LORD, and buoyed along by an incredible amount of optimism.

But there are times when he's blind and he's clueless to it, or he's wrong and oh, my, he's so convinced that he is right! Over the years I've learned that there are times when my husband really needs me with all humility and winsomeness to dig in my heels and respectfully disagree!

What does that look like? Here you go...

1. Praying ahead of time for openness and words to say. Asking for God to prove preparing both of our hearts for that conversation, making it not a finger-pointing at each other battle, but the shoulder by shoulder let's look out together at the particular issue and come to agreement. And ask God to help both of us see ways the other is right, not just our own position.

2. Spending time actually thinking about how best to word what I want to say and spend time thinking about things I appreciate about my husband and his leadership. A heart full of gratitude is the best springboard for word of questioning. And, a heart full of gratitude sets my attitude in the correct posture for bringing up the word of questioning.

3. Waiting for a good moment, so probably not just as soon as he comes in the door and is tired from a long day.

4. Voicing my true appreciation for his leadership, even with specific examples of similar situations where his good leadership has blessed our family/the church so much. The idea is for the topic I'm going to be brought up not to look like a general slam against his leadership, which I do not intend it to be. My husband is a superb leader!

5. Bringing up the particular area of disagreement, stating his perspective as knowledgeably and charitably as I can; Inserting my view of the situation.

6. Talking together about our differences in perspective as well as the goals that we have in common. Discern where we agree already and how we can come to unity where we disagree. And, if it's not a matter of a difference in philosophy, but perhaps practically working out what we both agree upon, then it's talking about how we can get to a better application.

7. Praying together. Sometimes even just praying together helps as we voice up to God, in the earshot of each other, our differences and as God to knit us together into unity.

8. If we can't come to agreement, it's thinking about what we could read together or someone who we both respect and who knows us who could help us think through this better.

9. Taking time to thank him for listening to my opinion and appreciating his leadership again.

An Example

One example of a conversation like this that we've had together has been getting right the balance between sermon prep on Saturdays – one of Mark's key days for this – and being present at the kids sports activities when they were growing up. Different pastors "cook" their sermons in different times of the different ways. Some men can do their sermon prep early in the week and be good with that. My husband has always been a Friday and Saturday sermon prep kind of guy. Saturday he is in the thick of his heaviest thinking and writing. He is extremely distracted!

When other men ask him about sermon prep times, he admits he's a Friday and Saturday kind of guy and he urges them not to be Friday and Saturday guys themselves for the sake of their families. Now that the kids are out of the house it's easy for him just to prep all day Saturday. Empty nesters can go on dates most any night of the week they want to! Friday nights and Saturdays do not take on the same special value as they did when our kids were in the home. The tug kept coming for us when our kids didn't just want any parent at their event on Saturday, but they wanted their father there at an event on Saturday.

This tug between his work on the sermons and the kids Saturday events was one of the times when I had to go to him and help him see how much they wanted him there and help them think through way that he could do both sermon prep and be there for them. I can't say we ever really got it right like a once-and-done sort of thing.

There were multiple conversations on this. Not nagging kind of conversations. But multiple conversations, nonetheless. But because I knew that it wasn't that he didn't want to be there for his kids, but that this was when he wrote his sermons, that helped me have a sympathetic tone to my voice as I brought this up. And, it made me truly appreciate ways he did set aside his sermon even on Saturdays in order to be there for them.

When he did do this, I tried to make sure to remember to encourage him about what a difference it made for the kids for him to take time out of his sermon prep to be there for them. I think probably looking back, he wishes he had done a lot more than he had. Just like when I look back, I can see so many things I wish I had done differently or better. Good thing that asking forgiveness is an option. There have been many things that Mark and I both have had to apologize to our kids about. And now that they are grown and have kids of their own, I think they get it more than ever. This parenting stuff sure is difficult!

QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. How do you avoid nagging about issues that regularly come up with your husband?
2. Are there areas where you have helped your husband through humble, yet winsome conversation?
3. Have you seen God bless this approach towards your husband?
4. Any other words of advice to wives trying to grow their ability to be winsome, yet humble?

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

God Is Faithful to Fight Our Sin: Idols, Israel, David, and Us

In the last section we looked at Psalm 16:3 and thought about what it means to delight in the saints. Here is verse 4, we see the most fundamental reason why David delighted in the saints: because the saints were those who worshipped the LORD instead of other gods.

Other gods. The gods of the peoples of Canaan. High god El and his wife, Asherah. Warriors: Baal, Anat and Astarte. Forces of destruction: Nahar the River; Mot, the god of burning, pestilence and death; and murderous Molech, abomination of children. Over 200 gods in the Canaanite pantheon have been recorded. Their worship required sacrifice, (some, even human sacrifice) and ritual sex. Their images were cast out of bronze and gold by their worshippers.

While they had no mouth of their own, no hands of their own, no life of their own to act or to speak, yet they were believed to promise fertility in families, animals and crops (which in this very agrarian society meant prosperity) and power to defeat their enemies. They required little from you in your day to day working out of life, but if you wanted something from them, they had to be negotiated with, appeased, persuaded to help. And hopefully, if you did the right things, they seemed to pay out… sometimes.

How very different they were from the LORD, who was like this:

> "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin…" --Exodus 34:5-6

But whom to follow? Whom to choose? Seems obvious, doesn't it? The LORD, the one, true, living God, right?

And yet it was no open and shut case. Israel, even at the foot of Mt. Sinai, just weeks after the LORD had rescued them, was allured to worship an idol--the golden calf. Idolatry would be a sad part of Israel's story, year after year. Kings, prophets, priests, and common people. They all were enticed to turn away from the Lord. Only by the LORD's gracious mercy, and for the sake of His covenant with Abraham, did He not abandon them, as they deserved.

David and Idols

But by God's grace, David was different. When the pressures of life closed in on him, he refused to turn to these other gods to meet his needs. He had seen the LORD rescue him, protect him, strengthen him, bless him. He knew He was the one, true God. Out of this heart, come the words of Psalm 16:4:

> "The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods. I will not pour out their libations of blood or take their names on my lips."

David appears to have held true to this vow his whole life. There is not even a hint of his worshipping the gods of the people around him.

However, that does not mean that David did not struggle with the same sinful desires that were behind the worship of those false gods. Was not Satan successful in tempting David to count his army of Israel because David's heart resonated with a desire to glory not in the LORD, but in his own strength? Was it not lust that made Bathsheba so enticing to David? Did he not let it bloom into the sin of adultery and later murder, as he tried to cover up what he did? And with this kind of idol worship came an increase in sorrow upon both David and generations of his family, as both he and they were to see.

"Do not commit adultery…. Do not murder." These are two of the most central commandments of God's laws that David loved; yet, he would knowingly break both. His was not a deliberate act of worship at the feet of one of those foreign gods—classic "idolatry." His temptation started as desire, entangled him as sin, and tripped him up as he ran the race set out for him by God. But the LORD still judged what David did as "utter contempt for His Word" and therefore, for Him. David deserved to lose not only his throne, but his life and relationship with God for what he had done.

Mercifully, God had plans for David that were different from what he deserved. While the consequences of David's actions indeed brought an increase in sorrow upon both him and generations of his family, these were softened and redeemed by God's grace. He sent Nathan to help David see his sin for what it was, to repent, and find mercy. Instead of removing David's family from the throne, the LORD held to His promise for David's family to reign forever.

How like David we are! We love God, and desire to obey His laws; but we are tempted and even fall like him, too. Praise God for that son of David who came as the Forever King! Jesus Christ! Through Him we have forgiveness. Through Him, we have power to fight the fierce battles against the sin we face. Through Him, we know the victory has been already won!

In this section of talks we will first look at why we struggle with sin, and the weapons God gives us to fight our struggles, whatever they are. Then, we will think about particularly common sin battlefronts of pastors and their wives. We'll end by arming you with encouragement to keep fighting by looking at the victory Christ has won, is winning, and will win for us!

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

God's Faithfulness to Fight Our Sin: The War and the Weapons

Do you remember the old fairy tale, Hansel and Gretel? There is a crafty enemy who used the promise of a delectable treat to lure someone else's children away from home and trap them for his own evil purposes. Sounds a bit Genesis 2, doesn't it? In the Garden, the Satan tempts Adam and Eve in much the same way.

He engaged them with a thought.
He showed them the treat.
He enticed them with its attractiveness.
They reached out to eat.

It worked. They fell, and with them, all of us. And since the Garden, the enemy has continued his plan of taking what should be good and enlisting it as a masquerade for his evil purposes. Our hearts, meant to know and love the Lord, are darkened with sin We rebel and die. People, meant to love God and to love each other, use each other to their own selfish satisfaction.

Who came to Hansel and Gretel's rescue? A woodcutter who followed a trail of breadcrumbs the children dropped as they followed the witch to her house of delights. Who has come to our rescue? The God who sought out His wayward children. Praise God for the promise of a Savior who would redeem all who put their trust in Him as they looked forward in faith, like David; and, look back in faith, like us! Through Jesus we have forgiveness of sin and a new heart that desires to love God and obey Him that is being slowly transformed into Christ's likeness. And one day, we will have complete freedom from our struggles, when we go to heaven or at the end of time, when sin and death are defeated once and for all.

But until the day we are called home, we are called to fight! God wove our fight against sin into His plans for our transformation. The change is all from Him, but it is through us that He does His work. Let's take a look at the roots of sin and temptation in our hearts, and at the weapons God gives us to do battle against them.

Wired for Desire

"For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander." –Matthew 15:19, NIV

Our hearts are wired for desire.
- We were meant to be engaged with thoughts… of God.
- We were meant to see His treats… eternal life with Him
- We were meant to be attracted to… fellowship with Him and life lived His good way.
- We were meant to taste and see… that the Lord is good, all the days of our lives.

Those desires are meant to give birth to good things. "

> God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Genesis 1:28

But sin has messed with that wiring. Our hearts have been re-routed to look for satisfaction in things other than what God intended for us. Our desires give birth to sin and to death now.

> "Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death." –James 1:15

The Weapons

As new creations in Christ, our hearts have been re-wired again: back to a love of God and His good ways. Through Jesus we have forgiveness of sin and a new heart that desires to love God and obey Him. But while the fundamental work has been done, this is a re-wiring project that will last our whole life and only be finished when we are home with God. Until then, there will always be leftover faulty connections luring our hearts away from God.

So, until that wonderful day when we go to be with God, there will be more work to do to transform our hearts. Praise God, it is His work! He is the One who makes it happen. But, He wove us into the work He planned in our hearts and in the hearts of other believers. Let's take a look at the tools God gives us to do this transformative work.

1. Start with the Heart

Ask God to show you where your tendencies and particular allurements lie. Ask your husband and close friends what they see, too.

- Look at your loves (What are your treasures?)
- Look at your temperament (Are you prone to certain tendencies, such as anxiety?)
- Look at your strengths and weaknesses (Where are you confident in your own competencies? What type of circumstance or job would you be quick to turn down?)
- Look at your past wounds and insecurities (What would you like to avoid experiencing again? What gives you reason to doubt your worth?)

Some other questions that might help reveal your heart's desires:

- Where do I weep, when I should rejoice with others?
- Where do I rejoice when I should weep with others?
- Where do I want to be the "only flower in the garden" (Don't want to share power with others).
- For what would I like someone to erect a statue to me?
- Where do I want there to be a hole if I'm not there to fill it? (want to make sure I'm indispensable)?
- How do I feel when someone else comes along with a better version of my own gifts?

I'm not saying this will be fun or easy to take a good, hard look at yourself. Jesus says in Matthew 6:21: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Sinful actions spring out of desire. Desires come from our heart. We need to know ourselves better to know where we are more vulnerable to temptation.

2. Put a Name to Them

I found a scary compilation of the 122 sins named in the Bible. I was horrified to see how many sins there are and how many times I could write my name next to them because of desires in my heart or actions in my life. But, the good thing about looking at that list prayerfully was that I identified areas of temptation. Whether you look at a list like that, or many of the shorter lists found in Scripture (such as Mark 7:21-23; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; Galatians 5:19-21; Romans 1:29-31), or simply notice what the Bible calls sin as a part of your Bible study, it is of great benefit to name your sin struggles.

3. Praise God for the Gospel!

Taking a serious look at the sin in your heart can be so discouraging. if you stop right there.

For we know that :

> "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"
> --Jeremiah 17:9,

But we know that God means for us to look at our sins to see the need for the Savior and to desire to turn away from them:

> "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret." --2 Corinthians 7:10

This means, that God can use our deeper knowledge of our sin to love Jesus even more!

> "Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" --Romans 5:7-9

4. Prepare

Look for patterns. Try to understand the circumstances where you have seen these desires and sin struggles pop up. What seems to be at the core? Where are you most likely to be dragged away by your desires? What conditions are present when you struggle and fail; what conditions are present when you struggle and win? What could help you in the moment when you struggle? What could you change in the structure of your situation (such as not being alone in times you know to be tempting)? What strategy might help you to be prepared or to avoid these temptations?

With these answers in mind, go to your Bible and look for verses that address your sin struggles and the heart issues they come from. God's Word can equip us to fight well. It is alive and active! We need it to fight with it and for us!

For example, you might struggle with jealousy when someone else is picked to lead an event that you previously led and hoped to continue to lead. As you look at your heart, you see this jealousy is coming from desire to be seen of value. To be un-needed is to seem worthless.

You might choose James 4:2-3 to help IDENTIFY your struggle:

> "You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."

You might choose this verse to FIGHT the sin-lie with truth that your worth is never found in what you do, but in what Christ did for you:

> "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. To remind you that God prepared certain good works for you to do…. And that also means there are certain good works He has for others to do." --Ephesians 3:10

You might choose this truth to TURN YOUR MIND AWAY from yourself and onto the good that God is doing even through the circumstances of this other woman being chosen.

> "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. --Philippians 4:8-9 ESV

5. Pray, Pray, Pray

Pray for God to work His Word in you by His Holy Spirit! Pray for Jesus to intercede for you! Pray at the beginning of the day. Pray as you go!

Pray for the promised way out of temptation, a la 1 Corinthians 10:13:

> "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."

Pray for God to help you in your weakness and to give Himself glory by giving you sufficient power to win the battle you are in. Confess your sin. Ask for God to create a clean heart in you. Ask Him to help you keep fighting and not lose heart. Have others pray with you. Thank God that Jesus came and that heaven's coming. God loves to answer these prayers!

6. Be Prudent

Look at the situations where you are likely to be sorely tempted. Is there anything you can do ahead of time to be ready for those circumstances? Would it be wise to some way limit or avoid those circumstances? Be prudent by choosing your fight by knowing your muscle tone! No beginner boxer would dream of stepping into the ring with a champion prize fighter. He knows he doesn't have what it will take to win. He is headed for a bruising and a knock-out.

Same goes for us. There may be an opportunity that we would love to take part in, but they might put us in way of too strong of a temptation for too long. It would be more honoring to God to pass on it and say yes to something more our size.

One example of this for me is how worried I get before speaking to a large group. The anticipation eats away at me and even makes me sick! I've learned to not accept speaking obligations that are locked in months in advance. It's ok, and even good, for me to fight my sin struggles with fear of (wo)man for a week or two, but months is just too much. I have more important stewardships, such as caring for my husband, that I need to do. I will trust God to find someone else better suited for the task.

7. Proclaim

Speak to others about your tendencies. Ask for their advice. Ask them to hold you accountable regularly. Don't go it alone. Sin loves isolation and darkness. It shrinks in the light. Achan in Joshua 7:19. Confessing sin glorifies God. Remember "Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and honor him. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me."

One of the blessings of having a godly spouse is you have a built-in, all-committed person who loves you and longs to see you fight sin and grow in godliness. It may feel awkward, if this is new to you, but ask each other where you are struggling against sin and how you can pray. There are often "glaring" sin struggles, but there may be others that come out through your asking. But also ask God to help you find same-sex friends that you can each share your struggles with honestly. There is a different kind of help that comes from these friendships. Sometimes friends can say hard things we need to hear or hold us to accountability that can come across as nagging from our spouses.

8. Put to Death Daily

Don't you wish you had a chopping block where you could lay your sin and chop off its little head and be done with it! Too bad our sin struggles are like chickens… they find a way to keep running around even when we do cut off their heads! Even so, God's Word is full of admonitions for us to put to death our sin, so we must try. I think Jesus tells us what this putting to death looks like: not a "one and done" event, but a daily, even hourly, activity: "Then [Jesus] said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." -- Luke 9:23, NIV This seems to be God's usual plan for transforming us: little bit-sized pieces of obedience.

9. Persevere

Persevere in doing good, even if you are frustrated that the good is tangled up with mixed motives. On this side of heaven, very little we do will not be infected with sin in some way. Doesn't Isaiah 64:6 say:"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags." If we wait until we only have a pure heart to do good, then we will do no good at all. That doesn't mean we go fool-heartedly into a situation with we know will make us likely to sin. It doesn't mean that we don't need to ask advice of those who know us as to whether what we are doing seems wise. It does mean that God still has good works prepared for us, even with our not-fully sanctified hearts. Let's do them!

And remember, saying God's Word is power to change us does NOT mean that is an Insta-drug. Nor is prayer. God loves to grow us slowly. Hence the words "transform", "renew," "strive," "persevere" and many other slow-change verbs are what pastors like Paul uses to encourage God's people to keep fighting sin. So, just because the "wallpaper" of Scripture keeps peeling off the walls of your heart and falling down, don't despair. Stick God's Word back up on your heart again! Confess your struggles to a friend again! Keep on praying! Where there's a fight, there is fruit on the way! Here are some of God's promises that He works as we persevere:

> "And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up." ----Galatians 6:9
>
> "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." –Romans 5:2-5

Questions for You

1. What did you learn as you examined the desires of your heart?

2. What weapons have you found most useful in fighting the sinful desires of your heart?

3. How do you fight discouragement when you struggle and even lose against sin in your life?

4. Do you ever feel like you can't ask God to forgive you yet again for a sin struggle? What do you do in those times?

5. Are there any other weapons that you've found useful in fighting sin?

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: Desiring Protection from the World

"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. –John 15:18-20, NIV

A GOOD THING

Desiring protection from the world is a good thing. It is an echo of the perfect world without sin that God created for us to peacefully and happily enjoy. And it is a glimmer of the world to come, in which there will never be any opposition to God or brokenness of sin that can make us unsafe anymore.

A GOOD THING GONE BAD

But now, in the "Now and Not Yet," there IS opposition and there IS danger. And, there are choices as to where we go to find the safety we desire, not all of them God-pleasing. This is why longing for this good thing can be a tempting sin struggle.

Gospel Opposition
Jesus promised persecution for being His followers and the world has most definitely delivered! The gospel that we love stands opposed to gods and demi-gods they bow down to. There are those who would hurt us or even kill us to stop the gospel.

Their Gods Are False Gods
Did you realize that most of the world even now, worship literal idols—statues not unlike the ones in David's day. In America and in Europe, this might sound like an oddity, unless perhaps your Asian American and you're visiting your grandmother's house who immigrated from China and brought her idols with her. But if you live in Asia or Africa, or even parts of South America, idol worship is a big deal.

If you become a Christian, you have to renounce these idols, turning your back on family and what you used to rely upon. And THAT is a big deal! If you are a pastor, you are preaching to your congregation to renounce these idols. But even the religions without graven image, such as Islam, we offend by rejecting their gods and their sacred writings.

Add to this, the pseudo-religions of cultural norms, government regulations, political views, racial views, and now even gender identity, and you have pretty much covered the reasons why Christians are persecuted, jailed, and killed over the past two thousand years. And even though in America, we are not yet jailed or killed for these things, we are increasingly persecuted for how our biblical stances.

Gospel Location
Sometimes it's not so much opposition to the gospel that you struggle with, but simply the danger in the area where your church is located.

This was a concern we took into consideration when we moved to a very different Capitol Hill over 30 years ago. The kids and I arrived here ahead of Mark, and I remember being scared enough to have all three of us sleep in the same bed, with our new "watch dog" and with the phone of our neighbor and a heavy metal rod next to the bed. We were told which streets were safe to walk on and which areas to drive in. We heard gun fire and had helicopters circle our block over and over for hours at night as they were looking for someone on the run. Robberies and murder happened quite near to us. One woman was killed as she let her dog out in the middle of the night. I'm sure our D.C. story is nothing compared to many, but it played into our decision-making and my struggle with fear.

THE TEMPTATIONS FOR PASTORS/THEIR WIVES

When persecution is the concern, it may be tempting to want to hide the truths that don't just make us unpopular, but may be the excuse for others to harm us.

In countries open to the gospel, maybe the "persecution" comes through insults or exclusions from our neighbors, community, and the media. Maybe, shootings of church members or our buildings set on fire. There certainly are growing government sanctions in the United States and around the world against those who do not legitimize the LGBQ+ lifestyles.

In closed countries, such as China, the government already blocks the spread of Christian literature and forbids gospel preaching churches to meet. Churches are shut down, and members (particularly pastors) are imprisoned, if caught. In other countries where Islam or Hinduism is the religion of the culture and/or the State, foreigners who come to preach the gospel can be hurt or deported; nationals can be tortured or killed.

Will our husbands and us struggle to water down the gospel? To shut up about sin and its consequences? To choose language that sounds more inclusive than it actually is? To be a chameleon who looks like one thing to the world, yet to another in the church?

What harm will come to my husband or even me? How will we endure that? Who will take care of me or our children if something happens to him? What will happen to the church? Will we lose our ability to worship? Will we stand or fall under suffering and persecution? Will we risk speaking to nationals in closed countries about the gospel, to disciple them, to let them worship with us when their presence among us could lead to how expulsion and to their death?

Will my husband's words wind up getting him arrested one day? It has happened in the UK already. My temptation is to want to run and hide, not to be like Peter and John and the believers who praised God for suffering for Jesus. Or Paul who was happy, who counted it all joy to be filling up in his body the sufferings of Christ.

As well as struggles for their own protection, pastors and their wives struggle over the well-being of the believers who come from families who are devoutly Muslim, Hindu or other religions. How do they help protect these new believers' lives while encouraging them proclaim their allegiance to Christ? Among singles, how do they help find Christian spouses rather than be forced to marry the non-believing person their family designates for them? How can the church family be new family to those who are cut off from their biological family because of Christ?

In cases of pastoring in an unsafe ministry location, our struggles may center on our children's well-being by bringing them to live in an area where they might be in danger. As some relatives cautioned us when we were considering coming to DC: "Are you sure you are doing the best thing for your kids by exposing them to such danger with all those shootings around you?" And, while we may hold to a strong belief in God's protection over our family, pressure from family and our own fear may tempt us to want to choose a more "controlled" suburban environment to be in ministry.

In all these situations, are we tempted to hate those who oppose the gospel, who hurt us, or who bring the crime that makes us feel unsafe?

No wonder we are tempted to seek for protection from the world in the wrong places! Evil seems so strong and its weapons against us may put our very lives at stake. How do we fight this temptation?

RECOGNIZE THE ROOTS

Examine your temptations and look at your heart's desires that are at the root. These can help us see where we need to fight sin where it starts. You might find desires like this, when you struggle with desiring protection from the world:

Holding Tightly to This Life:
- I don't want our lives to be "cut short."
- I don't want my husband, my family, other believers to suffer.
- I don't want to lose the good things in life our family enjoys.

Wanting Control:
- Is God really sovereign over persecution that might come our way?
- I want to make sure He doesn't let my husband/me suffer.
- Will God protect our family from harm in our neighborhood?

Fearing Abandonment:
- Will God take care of us if my husband loses his livelihood?
- Who will take care of our kids if we are killed and they are left behind?
- Will the church still persevere in persecution?

Will Fail to Remain Faithful to God in Persecution:
- Will I stay true to God and choose to suffer or even die?
- Will I know what to say to honor God?
- Will I retaliate with hatefulness or allow my heart to become bitter, if my family suffers for the gospel?

Will Not Know How to Best Help New Believers as They Deal with Persecution:
- Will I be responsible for their torture or death by saying the wrong thing?
- Will the church be able to care well for those who are cut off from their family?
- What is the best way to stand for Christ, yet be wise in persecution?

Heart Will Be Filled with Hate, Bitterness or Unforgiveness towards Others:
- Can I keep on loving my enemies, even though they make our lives so hard and impede the gospel?

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.

Holding Tightly onto This Life:
Life with Christ in heaven will be even better than whatever we hold dearest or find most enjoyable here. The best is yet to come!

> "I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. --Philippians 1:20-23, NIV

> "Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. 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." --Hebrews 10:33-35

Wanting Control:
God is in control! He has our lives all planned out. He knows our days. No enemy or dangerous location can cut short our lives or our children's lives.

> "Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. –Psalm 139:7, ESV

> "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Ephesians 2:10, NIV

Fearing Abandonment:
Nothing can separate us from God. He will always take care of my husband and my family. We cannot be abandoned because He is always with us.

> "What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. –Romans 8:32-39, NIV

Will Fail to Remain Faithful to God in Persecution:
God is at work in us. He will help us fulfill all of His plans for us. He will give us the words, the courage and the strength to hold firm to our faith in Him.

> "Look, I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as serpents and as harmless as doves. Because people will hand you over to sanhedrins and flog you in their synagogues, beware of them. You will even be brought before governors and kings because of Me, to bear witness to them and to the nations. But when they hand you over, don't worry about how or what you should speak. For you will be given what to say at that hour, because you are not speaking, but the Spirit of your Father is speaking through you. --Matthew 10:16-20, HCSB

> "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:8, ESV

Will Not Know How to Best Help New Believers as They Deal with Persecution:
God will give us what is needed to do all He calls us to do.

> "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." –James 1:5, NIV

Heart Filled with Hate, Bitterness, and Unforgiveness towards Enemies:
God sees your enemies and calls you to mirror Him in your graciousness towards them. He will reward you greatly.

> "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.…You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." –Matthew 5:12, 43-45, HCSB

RUN TO GOD

Ask Him to work in your heart and give you confidence in His promises. Ask Him to help you entrust your life to God, your Father, just like Jesus did. Hold up the promises of God's Word to God. Ask Him to fulfill them in your husband's and your life. Ask Him to strengthen you and make the desire of your heart to honor Him outweigh even this earthly life. Ask Him to make you like Stephen, who responded with prayer and love to those who insulted and killed him. Pray for your enemies that God might open their eyes to the truth of the gospel, just like He did Paul's.

REACH OUT TO OTHERS

Ask others to join you in prayer for boldness, like the church did in Acts 4:31. Ask them to pray for the gospel to continue to go out, even in the face of persecution. Their prayers will be fundamental to sustaining you in your difficult ministry situation.

Ask the advice of those who have faced similar persecution what they have done, practically and spiritually, to be shrewd in the face of persecution to help the church be able to keep meeting, to not unduly inflame enemies by your actions, yet to stay true to spread and preach the gospel. Ask them how God has helped them fight their fear of persecution.

Ask others who share your neighbor or have lived in other dangerous locations for practical advice. If Christians, ask them about fears they have struggled with and how God has helped them.

ARMED AND READY

In the Moment:

> "But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear or be disturbed, but honor the Messiah as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. However, do this with gentleness and respect, keeping your conscience clear, so that when you are accused, those who denounce your Christian lifewill be put to shame." –1 Peter 3:14-16

Set your mind to expect suffering. Jesus promised it. (John 16:33) But, He also promised that He has overcome the world. Set your mind to expect Him to help you as you face it.

If you tend to be slow on your feet or quick to be angry or unkind when confronted by insults or faced with suffering, take time to write down a God-honoring defense. Ask God to put those words in your memory and soak into the attitude of your heart. You might never use this "script" as written, but will bless your prayers and can prepare your mind with better words in the moment.

Social media can also be a place where Christians can be easily insulted and unfortunately, easily retaliate in a manner not worthy of the gospel. If you are offended by someone's words, see it as an opportunity to love your enemies and commend the gospel.

In the Church:

Hopefully, your husband will be one of a group of elders who can together pray and make good decisions for your church regarding response to persecution. Or, if a sole pastor, can be in contact with other elders/pastors at other churches facing similar persecution for advice. As 1 Peter 3:14-16 pointed out: there is no time like being wrongly treated to commend the gospel through our godly, loving response. If your husband or your church has any opportunity to respond publicly to mistreatment, ask God to help you do this in love and to His glory to commend the gospel.

Build or ask God to bring a strong core of brother and sister believers to work alongside you in your ministry situation. Especially in closed countries, they will be your God-provided life support system in the day to day struggles to keep on trusting in God and to keep on doing gospel work.

In Your Strategy:

Scheme with those who think of ways to get the gospel literature into closed countries. Strategize how you can live peaceably with your government and your community, with those who oppose you, yet stand strong in the gospel. Be wise in your contacts with those in closed countries who are interested in the gospel or who accept the gospel. How can you both help them grow and worship, yet protect them and you from suspicion that might lead to persecution or expulsion. Plan what your family or your church will do when persecution comes.

Read

Stories of God's faithfulness to His people in times of suffering. Such as The Shadow of the Almighty (Jim and Elisabeth Eliott), To the Golden Shore (Adoniram Judson), Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Spoke in the Wheel, and Evidence Not Seen (Darlene Deibler Rose) as realistic stories of persecution, loss, and God's provision and blessing through them.

REPENT ON REPEAT PLEASES GOD

Living in a world offended by the gospel gives us many opportunities to face persecution and to fear persecution. God is kind to forgive us and help us keep on fighting to trust Him and to respond in a God-honoring way to our enemies and to the insults and suffering they bring on us. God is pleased with our fight and is the One who will help us fight.

YOUR MERCIFUL HIGH PRIEST

Jesus knows your struggle! He, too, was tempted to choose safety rather than suffering. Satan used Peter to tempt Jesus to turn away from the suffering of the cross, but Jesus said "no."

"From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.". –Matthew 18:21-23, ESV

He was insulted, beaten and killed, yet God helped Him to endure it by remembering the joy to come.

"[Let us fix] our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." –Hebrews 12:2, NIV
He who endured all of this is tender-hearted towards us and able to help us through the insults and suffering from the world we face.

Questions for You

1. How do you/have you desired to be protected from 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?

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: Desiring Protection in the Church

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" –Psalm 133:1

A GOOD THING

Feeling safe in the church is a good thing. We were meant to live together in unity. It is an echo of the perfect fellowship Adam and Eve enjoyed before the Fall. "Naked and unashamed" was more than just the lack of clothes. It was a lack of hiddenness or need of self-protection. There was no selfishness or self-ambition. They were fully known to each other and were fully unified in their love for God and His good plans. And, it is the promise of the world to come, in which our hearts will know and enjoy each other fully and worship God together fully, without any fear or selfishness.

A GOOD THING, GONE BAD

But now, in the "Now and Not Yet," there IS selfishness and self-ambition. We all have sinful hearts. There are desires that war inside of us and put us at odds with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We look for safety to protect us from the very ones we are to enjoy unity and fellowship. And, there are choices as to where we go to find the safety we desire, not all of them God-pleasing. This is why longing for safety in the church can be a tempting sin struggle.

Why Are We at Odds with One Another?
What causes the sin struggles to arise between church members? You could write down most of the New Testament in answer to this question!

Here are three, major categories:
1. Trouble from the World
Racial tension, pandemic restrictions, political clashes may be part of the world, but they do not wait nicely outside the church doors. We bring them with us as we gather to worship God and love one another each week. Will the same ignorance, prejudice, mean-spiritedness, or even aversion of others be true of our treatment of one another? How do our pastor/husbands lead their local congregation in wisdom, charity and unity? How will we respond to those who consider our husbands wrong or uncaring in their response to world issues?

2. Christian Freedom
Praise God for the clear, black and white truths of the gospel! But oh, how we need help when it comes to all the matters of Christian freedom! Is it ok to drink? How much? Does the Bible tell us we must homeschool our children? Sometimes it seems there are as many opinions as there are members! How do our pastor/husbands help us be thoughtful and respectful of each other's exercise of freedom within the gospel? How do we deal with members who look down upon the way our family has chosen to exercise Christian freedom?

3. Baggage from Our Past

Even after we become Christians, made new in Christ, we unfortunately bring our "old man" with us to wrestle with, even as we are being transformed into likeness of Christ. This old man seems to especially ove to stir up trouble in the church when it comes to trusting leadership in general, and male "dominated" leadership in particular. Whether it was a father who misused his authority and neglected or hurt his family; or, some other person of influence who did not live worthy of the trust placed in them, many believers struggle with trusting the pastors/elders. Our husbands may be misjudged and distrusted not because of their actions, but because of someone's past.

How will they respond when their leadership is questioned? How will we respond to those who hurt our husbands when we know they work so hard for the welfare of the sheep? How will they be tempted to avoid "tough love" that would be best for a particular member knowing that they may very well be misunderstood and attacked?

Sin Lurking in Our Hearts

Perhaps the biggest and most fundamental reason we look for safety in the church is because of the selfish desires in each of our hearts. James said it well:

"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." –James 4:1-3, ESV

How will we and our husbands respond to the quarrels and fights among members? How will we respond to those directed at our husbands and even to us? How will we deal with the selfish desires that war in our souls that tempt us away from what is best for the church or best for a particular church member? How do we avoid becoming bitter or closing ourselves off from members or giving into gossip about those who have mistreated us?

THE TEMPTATIONS FOR PASTORS/THEIR WIVES

No wonder we are tempted to seek for protection in the church in the wrong places! Pastors are called to follow Jesus' example and lay down their lives for the sheep, but this is sometimes very hard and painful. No one enjoys being misunderstood, distrusted or unappreciated.

Our husbands and we alongside of them may be tempted to avoid the crush on our self-worth by raising up "yes men" who never correct or question. They may be tempted to go along with things, turn a blind eye, skirt around difficult issues or just settle to let those who are different find another church so they don't have to help the congregation find unity.

We may be tempted to avoid hurt by striving for perfectionism and be seen as a "Do It All" woman that no one can find fault with. Or, we might be tempted to put up a façade and avoid letting people get to know us or our family. We might try to keep our problems to ourselves. Or as wives, we might pour ourselves into a "backstage" ministry to hide from the general membership.

When hurt, we may be tempted not to reconcile but to remain unforgiving, bitter and even vengeful. We may be tempted to slander and gossip others and pity ourselves. We may want to lash out against those who hurt our husbands. Or, to simply weave a thicker cocoon to insulate us better from future hurts, or simply despair.

RECOGNIZE THE ROOTS

Examine your temptations and look at your heart's desires that are at the root. These can help us see where we need to fight sin where it starts. You might find desires like this when you struggle with desiring protection in the church:

Fear of "Man"
It is tempting to let our desire for approval from others keep our husbands or ourselves from loving the congregation in hard, but good ways. Whether it is confronting sinful prejudices or enduring hurtful responses, our desire for the respect for others can tempt us to avoid difficult situations or try to shield ourselves from others as a way to be safe.

Forgetting God Is the Great Shepherd/Failing the Church
Pastors are only under-shepherds. They can never take God's place and "save" the church. At heart we can see that we are forgetting that we must rely on God rather ourselves for the church to survive and even thrive. He will have to be the one who equips His pastors He is the one who will have to give the wisdom needed. He is the one whose Holy Spirit is able to help us forgive, persevere, and grow in unity.

Pride that Sees Only Your Way as Correct
When it comes to matters of Christian freedom in lifestyle and issues related to topics like politics and racial tensions, it can be tempting to take a "my way or the highway" stance. These arrogantly, strongly-held opinions voiced between church members and especially from our husbands can turn the focus off of our unity in Christ.

Especially for our church located in D.C. where so many members work in politics, it has been of monumental importance to urge humility and respect for those whose opinions differ from you. Our pastors have had to watch their hearts and their mouths carefully in order to encourage the congregation to do the same.

Troubles with Our Old Man
There is nothing like difficulty to open the coffin on our old way of reacting and thinking. When faced with difficulty in the church, we need to examine our hearts for these sinful responses.

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.

Wrongly Desiring People's Approval
We and our husbands are to love the church, but our hearts first belong to God.

> "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man." --John 2:24-25, ESV

> "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ." --Galatians 1:10. ESV

Forgetting God Is the Great Shepherd

Christ Is the head of the Church. He will equip our husbands. He will fulfill His plans. We can have confidence in His abilities every bit as much as we may doubt our own. We very well will suffer in caring for His people, but we can entrust our care into His hands.

> 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."--2 Corinthians 12:9

God Gives Power to Do What He Wants Our Husbands to Do

> "So don't be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord…Instead, share in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God. He has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began." --2 Timothy 1:8-9, ESV

We Can Entrust Our Hearts to God to Care for Us

> "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." --1 Peter 4:19, ESV

It Is Hard to Confront Our Sin and Sin in the Church, But the Church Is Worth It

> "Flee from youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But reject foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they breed quarrels. The Lord's servant must not quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone, able to teach, and patient, instructing his opponents with gentleness. Perhaps God will grant them repentance leading them to the knowledge of the truth. Then they may come to their senses and escape the Devil's trap, having been captured by him to do his will."--2 Timothy 2:24-26, ESV

Opposition to Sound Doctrine Is Expected. It Doesn't Mean Our Husbands Are Failing, But Often Shows that They Are Doing What God Wants Them to Do

> "Proclaim the message; persist in it whether convenient or not; rebuke, correct, and encourage with great patience and teaching. For the time will come when they will not tolerate sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, will multiply teachers for themselves because they have an itch to hear something new. They will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths. But as for you, be serious about everything, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."
>
> "For the grace of God has appeared with salvation for all people, instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age, while we wait for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He gave Himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for Himself a people for His own possession, eager to do good works. Say these things, and encourage and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you. --Titus 2:11-15, ESV
>
> "Remind them of these things, charging them before God not to fight about words; this is in no way profitable and leads to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth. But avoid irreverent, empty speech, for this will produce an even greater measure of godlessness." --2 Timothy 2:14-16, ESV

God Will Give Our Husbands the Wisdom They Need to Lead Their Church

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." --2 Timothy 3:16, ESV

Even If We Face Difficulties More than We Bear, We Can Rely upon God to Be Enough

"For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. "2 Corinthians 1:8-11, ESV

Jesus Is the Church's Head and Savior, Our Husbands Don't Replace Him, Only Work under Him

"He is before all things, and by Him all things hold together. He is also the head of the body, the church;" --Colossians 1:17-18, ESV

Jesus Gave Men Like Our Husbands to Equip the Church.
We can count on Him to equip them for the work He calls them to.

"And He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ;." Ephesians 4:11-12, NASB

Seek Unity, Fight Bitterness and Unforgiveness with God's Word and God's Spirit

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." --Colossians 3:12-17, NIV

Jesus Died that We Might Put Our Old Man to Death

"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. –1 Peter 2:24, ESV

Clothe Yourself with Charity and Humility Rather than Pride

"Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive."
-- Colossians 3:12-13, CSB

RUN TO GOD

Ask God to give you and your husband more of His heart for His people--full of love, compassion, mercy and protection more than they could ever deserve. Ask Him to prepare you to react in love when mistreatment comes. Ask Him to grow the fruit of His Spirit in your hearts. Ask Him to remind you both of how undeserving you are of His mercy as members treat you in ways that will need your mercy. Ask God to give your husband and the other elders wisdom to the best decisions for difficult, potentially divisive issues. Pray for God's people to grow in trusting their leaders and in love and unity with one another.

Ask God to help you entrust your hearts to Him, letting His love for you be where you find safety rather than hiding your hearts from loving God's people. Ask God to help your husband stand strong for sound doctrine, even when it is very unpopular, giving him winsome words to help members not go astray. Ask God to help your husband grow in his confidence in God's sovereignty and headship of the Church and in His ability to equip your husband to shepherd well under Him.

Pray, pray, pray when you are struggling with bitterness or unforgiveness! It may take time, but God will do this work in your heart! Ask God to give you a heart of gratitude for all of the blessings you and your husband have received through the church; and, for all the ways He has helped you and your husband in past struggles.

REACH OUT TO OTHERS

Be a church of prayer! Ask others to join you in praying for unity and love for your church.
You and your husband seek out same-sex, trusted friendships with whom you can share your hurts without embittering them to other church members. Ask their advice in how to fight temptation to withdraw from church members to protect your heart from hurts. Encourage these friends to be honest with you if they see unforgiveness, bitterness, slander or gossip in how you are reacting to difficulties.

Ask God to raise up other elders to serve alongside your husband to better think through difficult issues, helping members with their difficulties, and building unity in the church.

Seek to know people who are not like you that God might grow your love and appreciation for them. There's nothing like understanding someone else's perspective to grow your desire for their good.

ARMED AND READY

In the Moment:

> "But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear or be disturbed, but honor the Messiah as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason[d] for the hope that is in you. However, do this with gentleness and respect, keeping your conscience clear,[e][f] so that when you are accused, those who denounce your Christian life[h] will be put to shame." –1 Peter 3:14-16

Set your mind to expect fellow members to be sinners and for difficulties to arise. Hurtful comments will happen. Difficult situations will come. Set your mind to expect God to help you as you face it.

If you tend to be slow on your feet or quick to be angry or unkind when someone criticizes you or your husband, take time to write down a God-honoring defense. Ask God to put those words in your memory and soak into the attitude of your heart. You might never use this "script" as written, but will bless your prayers and can prepare your mind with better words in the moment.

Social media is all too often used as a personal soap-box for particular political or racial views. Be careful about the attitude and the extent that you air your opinions. in this seemingly "out-of-church" arena. Often church members are each others' friends on social media. You may unwittingly be making unity in the church more difficult by your comments. If you are offended by someone's words, see it as an opportunity to encourage forgiveness and kindness, helping lead towards unity and commending the gospel.

> "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." –Ephesians 4:29-32, NIV

In the Church:
Hopefully, your husband will be one of a group of elders who can together pray and make good decisions for your church regarding response to difficult situations Or, if a sole pastor, can be in contact with other elders/pastors at other churches facing similar difficulties for advice. Be serious about the Lord's Supper as a meal of unity as we remember what Christ did to make us His people.

As Paul says,"

> Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves." 1 Corinthians 11:28-29, ESV

Keep your accounts of offenses short! Seek out those you are out of fellowship with before you take the Lord's Supper. Encourage others to do this also! God would not call us to do this if He did not mean to help us forgive each other in the process!

In Your Strategy:
Learn the importance of the issues your husband and the other elders wrestle with. Appreciating their importance can help you support your husband as he makes hard stands. (See section on the Nine Marks for some common issues.) Learn each other and how you can beckon each other away from church concerns. Words of encouragement, a meal out with friends, a hike out in nature, intimacy in the bedroom are just a few ideas.

Learn the situations that tend to tempt you or your husband to fear your safety or seek your safety in someone or something other than God. Ask God to help you find His way through those situations in a way that honors Him.

Read
When People Are Big and God Is Small by Ed Welch

REPENT ON REPEAT PLEASES GOD

On this side of heaven, God's people will struggle to live together in love and unity. We will have to go back to our Savior again and again to forgive us and to help us to forgive others and treat them with more charity than they deserve. They will need to do that for our husband and us, too. God is pleased with our fight and is the One who will help us fight. And as we fight, we show the world who we will spend our lives aiming to love: our Savior and each other.

YOUR MERCIFUL HIGH PRIEST

Jesus knows your struggle! He knew what it was to be insulted and rejected by the very ones He came to save. He watched His disciples fight among themselves for the place of honor. He was weary with the sin of God's people.

> "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour.'–John 12:27, NIV

> "For to this you were called, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving an example for you to follow in his steps. He committed no sin nor was deceit found in his mouth. When he was maligned, he did not answer back; when he suffered, he threatened no retaliation, but committed himself to God who judges justly."

He who endured all of this is tender-hearted towards us and able to help us through the insults and suffering from the world we face.

Questions for You

1. How do you/have you desired to be protected from the church?

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?

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?

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: Seeking Prominence

"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you." –James 4:10

A GOOD THING

Being a respected leader is a good thing. The two verses above show that godly men should live in such a way as to win the respect of non-Christians in the world, as well as believers in their churches. In the Garden, God gave Adam authority over all the earth as well as over Eve. He was to lead in carrying out God's plans in complete selflessness, love and wisdom. Then Satan came and tempted Adam and Eve to distrust God's authority and seize power for their own purposes.

One day, when King Jesus brings in the new heavens and earth, all rebellion will be gone. Whatever grand plans He has for His people will once more be carried out perfectly. A part of those plans is ruling with Him. "If we endure, we will also reign with him." 1 Timothy 2:12, ESV

A GOOD THING, GONE BAD

But now, in the "Now and Not Yet," there IS desire gone wrong. We follow in Adam and Eve's broken footsteps. The power, respect, and popularity we desire are all too often focused on us: to get what we want, when we want it, or to bring honor ourselves. Where will our ambitions take us? To God or elsewhere?

While all sin boils down to some sort of pride, perhaps this desire for power and recognition most closely mirrors the heart of God's great enemy, Satan.

When we commend ourselves, our focus not on God and His people as it should be

> "Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measures themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding." --2 Corinthians 10:12

Pride leads us to rely upon ourselves and that leads to leadership failure

> "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe. A rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his imagination. Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor." --Proverbs 18:10–12

It leads us to ignore wisdom from other men and from God

> "The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise. Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence. The fear of the LORD is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor." --Proverbs 25:32-33

God will oppose us

"But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." –James 4:6

It creates disunity

"Where there is strife, there is pride, but wisdom is found in those who take advice." --Provervbs 13:10

It turns our thoughts away from God

"In his pride the wicked man does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God." --Psalm 10:4

It tempts us to use the callings of God for our own purposes, rather than God's

"Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach…

Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; 6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others.

But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." -- Matthew 23:1-3,5-12

THE TEMPTATIONS FOR PASTORS/THEIR WIVES

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

Meet Colonel Sanders and Wife

"Good sermon, pastor," are encouraging words every pastor hopes for as church members pass him on their way out the door. Our husbands poured hours of their time into that sermon, hoping that it would be helpful to those who listened. And if your husband hits a slump, with little positive feedback, little questions of "How are my ratings?" can easily creep in his mind. We, too, hear feedback, positive or negative, on our husband's sermons or other pastoral leadership. And while it is good to desire to consistently encourage the congregation, it is tempting to want everything to be "finger-lickin' good," as the Colonel calls his fried chicken, to keep those popularity polls riding high.

Rubbing Shoulders with the World

What does your husband do?" is a question I'm often asked when striking up a conversation with a new mother at the park or the person in line ahead of me at the grocery store. "He's a pastor," I reply. "Oh, what denomination?" they follow up. Gulp. Here is comes…. "Baptist." Then comes the polite, "oh, that's nice" response, when what they really mean is "There goes a conservative, religious freak." At least in D.C., that's how name dropping "Baptist" often goes, and with it, their respect. In situations like this, it is tempting to try cover up who I am and the (uncomfortable) truths of the gospel to hold a little longer onto the chance for respect. I don't like being considered a "fool."

Powerful People Who Attend Your Church

Sometimes the temptation to power is to be seen to be friends with people of influence. I suppose this is especially true here in DC, when at times, Congressmen, Senators and even Vice Presidents and their wives have attended our church. It can be tempting to be proud that someone so important heard about your church and wanted to hear you preach. And then, if they want to become members, well, that can seem like you must really be a person of prominence for them to choose you. This can be very tempting to think more highly of yourself (or your husband) at times like this.In all likeliness, your church is not in D.C. like ours, yet there are prominent people in every town. The temptation can be the same with them as it is here in D.C.

Powerful People in Your Church

There are also powerful people in your church. These are people who are respected or popular. They may who have leadership positions on various committees or over various ministries. Or, maybe they have been long in attendance and their very longevity make their opinion powerful. Pastors and their wives can be tempted to what to "kiss up" to these people to gain their approval in hopes of making your leadership more popular and more readily accepted. This is especially tempting for a new pastor and family recently called to a "turn around" churches where there are many who are members but may only be culturally Christians, not true believers. And if you wind up on their bad side, as you make stands other than what they approve of, it can be very tempting to be fearful, to change your language or to harbor anger against them.

Difficult Decisions in the Church

There is no time like leading a church through a major transition to both desire and feel a need for power and popularity. Your husband very likely see important changes needed (hopefully along with the other elders) and it will be against the way the church is used to doing things. It can be so tempting to fear, to smooze, to appease people in order to get their support for the changes. Or, to water down changes that need making. One of the most difficult circumstances is when a church member has continued in a pattern of sin for a long time, even after multiple conversations and warnings from the elders, and the elders recommend him to be removed from the church membership (in hopes he sees his sin, will repent, and will re-join). It is so tempting to want to hold onto your popularity and hold back on such a decision.

Sharing Leadership

Sometimes the temptation to power or for respect makes us not want to share leadership. If leadership is shared, then it isn't just us, but a group who is responsible for the admirable fruit. This is how little kingdoms of power rise up in the church. People are using ministry to collect worth and respect for themselves, rather than thinking about what would be best for the church. These church members are often some of the most reticent to change because they see their very self-worth at risk. This is one temptation that needs to be nipped in the bud early for the good of the leaders and the church. Term limits (even among elders). Shared leadership. An attitude of constantly training up someone to take your place can help.

But sometimes it is our husbands who struggle with sharing leadership. They want to make sure everything is done the best it can be and they are fairly certain (sometimes correctly) that they are the best ones to do everything that needs doing. Perhaps they struggle with perfectionism. It can be tempted for them to do it all rather than living within pastoring limits that are best for them and for your family. Other times, the problem is a desire to "self-brand,"—making what you do so unique that others admire and emulate you. Pastors are called to be examples, but the heart of self-branding is self-importance, not mentoring others.

Ministry Comparisons

It can be very tempting for our husbands to gauge their importance by comparing their ministry to that of another pastor, both in the church or at a different church. I've also found that pastors' wives have a huge temptation to compare themselves to other pastors' wives and families.

Blindspots

My husband has a saying about himself: "Always confident, sometimes right." He does have a way of always sounding like he knows what he's talking about. I've learned to press in when I'm pretty sure he's missing something. This has been of huge importance to the way he leads our family. He needs to know if he's missing something for him to care well for us. It can be tempting to not want to humbly but firmly raise questions of disagreement. There are certainly humble ways and prideful ways to do this. But it is such a gift to our husbands to winsomely help them see what they don't yet see. We need to pray for them not to be tempted to shut out our comments, but to hear them and be helped by them.

People Want to Be Associated with You

Another way prominence affects pastors and their wives is when church members want to be your friend because of who you are. Sometimes they truly admire you and long to learn from you and grow as friends. That is the blessing of prominence. But there are also many times when they really are only wanting to up their own importance by being able to say they are friends with the pastor, his wife or family. This name-dropping leads to jealousy among members who might feel like they aren't as important just because they don't know our husband or our family as well as someone else. This also can lead to gossip, when someone is tempted to tell your family's secrets just to show how well they know you. This is a big reason why it can be so hard for your husband and you to find good friends. (See section on finding and choosing friends for more help.)

RECOGNIZE THE ROOTS

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

- A love to be thought of as important in the eyes of the world or your church?
- A stinginess with leadership because you want to be seen as important?
- Perfectionism?
- Longing for people's approval more than God's?
- Arrogance? Being the best thing since sliced bread?
- Self-sufficiency?
- Bitterness towards those who distrust and disrespect your husband?
- Comparing ourselves to others to make ourselves feel of more worth?

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.

Cultivate Humility

> "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,"
> -- Philippians 2:3

Be Slow to Recognize Elders

He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil." 1 Timothy 3:7, ESV

Encourage Plurality of Leaders

"This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you."— Titus 1:5, ESV

Seek Advisers

"A wise man has great power, and a man of knowledge increases strength; for waging war you need guidance, and for victory many advisers." –Proverbs 24:5-6

Be An Example of Godliness and Humility in Your Leadership

"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." --Hebrews 13:7, ESV

Look to God Rather than Comparing Your Work to Others'

"Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But when they measures themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding." --2 Corinthians 10:12

Remember Pastors Will Be Judged More Strictly, a Cause for Great Humility

"Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness." –James 3:1, ESV

Knowing the Lord is More Important than Any Skill Set We Have

"Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord." -- Jeremiah 9:23–24

Seek Love, Not Self-prominence

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud." --1 Corinthians 13:4

"Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves." -- Romans 12:10

Seek Harmony by Turning Away from Pride

"Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. "-- Romans 12:16

Consider the Weakness of Another in How You Act in Matters of Christian Freedom

"Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against them in this way and wound

their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall." --1 Corinthians 8:9-13, ESV

Do Your Work and for Wait for God's Reward

"To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. "– 1 Peter 5:1-4

RUN TO GOD

Ask God to teach you and your husband humility. Ask Him to help you see your need of both Him and His people. Ask Him to give you grace to seek out the opinions of others and to honor others better than yourselves. Ask Him to raise up elders to serve alongside your husband who can provide correction and prevent blindspots in leadership. Ask Him to help your husband be encouraged but not puffed up by the members of the church. Ask Him to give your husband greater humility, the greater the fruit of ministry.

Ask Him to help your husband do what is best for the church members, even if it will be unpopular. Ask Him to help you not find your worth by comparing yourself to others, especially other pastors' wives. Ask Him to help everyone in your church increasingly honor others better than themselves and treat each other with love. Ask God to help your husband see his limits and be willing to choose what he should do and train up others to do what else needs to be done. Ask Him to help your husband trust God's sovereignty and care over your local church.

Pray for your husband and the other elders to stick to what they know is the most loving thing for the church and its members. Ask God to help them focus on doing what please Him and what He knows is caring for His sheep. But also pray for the congregation that they would trust their leaders and recognize their recommendations are from the Lord. Pray for your own heart that you will show forbearance and kindness towards those who respond with distrust to your husband's leadership.

REACH OUT TO OTHERS

Ask others to join you in prayer for a growing honor of one another and desire to put the needs of others' first. Ask them to pray for both you and your husband to not find your worth in ministry work, but look to God for His approval.

Cultivate friends that you and your husband can go to with your struggles and as honest sounding boards for your lives.

ARMED AND READY

In the Moment:
If you are tempted to water down the gospel to win (or not lose) the respect of a non-Christian, take time to write down ahead of time something you might say. Learn it and pray over it. Ask God to help you to stick to the truth (it doesn't have to be the exact words) when you do get into a conversation.

If you are feeling the pressure of being Colonel Sanders' wife as your husband preaches or leads a meeting, ask God to help you. Ask Him to turn your thoughts away from how finger lickin' good you

hope your husband is coming across, and pray for him to speak in love, wisdom and humility. Pray for the good of those listening rather than being consumed with wondering how good they think he is doing. Social media can also be a place where Christians can easily flaunt their successes in a way that encourages pride and comparison. Consider carefully what you read and what you post.

In Your Church:
Our husbands need people to help them with their blindspots even more at church. There are so many more people to care for and so many more issues to decide upon. When pride tempts our husbands that they have everything they need on their own, trouble is rarely far off. An abundance of advisers, such as an elder board, or other godly men whose opinion our husband seeks and listens to is so helpful to them avoiding mistakes that will hurt the church. They can also be a great help to our husbands regarding pride. They can help him avoid blindspots; share the leadership and avoid the "one-man-show" mentality. They can make and weather difficult decisions together, helping each other not be swayed from what is best for the church by pressures to be popular.

Whatever leadership role you have in the church, encourage working yourself out of job. Look for someone you can train up and replace you. Encourage others to do the same. Not only does this help us from putting our worth in what we do, but it will build healthy depth into the church.

In Your Strategy:
Ask the advice of other pastors how they have struggled with desiring power or popularity. Fight the temptation to compare your ministry to others by reminding ourselves to look to God and our husbands for our very custom calling. And, that God will encouragement the congregation even more by our different families to have different gifts being used—just like each of them will have different gifts God has given them to better equip the church as a whole. And, we can actively pray for and thank God for what we see Him using others to do. It's sort of ignoring the static of our heart and listening more carefully for the broadcast of God's work instead.

Read
Humility by C.J. Mahaney
Repent and Repeat Pleases God
With so much pride still living in our hearts, it is no wonder that we are so tempted to wield power and seek prominence for ourselves. 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 is deserving of all honor and power, yet He chose to be our servant to save us.
Who, being in very nature 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 with all the power and prestige in the world:

> "Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" --Matthew 4:8-10, NIV

Jesus saw what Satan offered as a way to get the world to honor Him (Jesus), was really only a trick to worship Satan. That is what pride always is. Jesus knows how tempting power and prestige are for us. He experienced it Himself. He knows how to pray for our husbands and for us to fight against pride and to turn to worship the Lord.

Questions for You

1. How do you/have you desired prominence for your husband or yourself in the church?
2. Has this led to any sin struggles for you or your husband? Are there any aspects of church life where these are a particularly big struggle for you or for your husband?
3. What has helped you/your husband in these struggles?
4. Do you have any other words of wisdom for people with this struggle?

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: Seeking Pleasure

"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." –Psalm 16:11

A GOOD THING

Pleasure is a good thing. Adam and Eve knew unending pleasure in the Garden—the pleasure of knowing God, the pleasure of a perfect marriage, the pleasure of a perfect world of delight, the pleasure of a pure desires coming from pure hearts. Then Satan came and tempted Adam and Eve by masquerading an act of sin as the way to ultimate good pleasure: being like God, knowing good and evil. After their disobedience, the mask came off. Sin had not brought greater pleasure. It had only broken Adam and Eve's ability to know the pleasures God had given them already. Now, we must wait for the day when we go to live with God and have those pure pleasures fully restored forevermore, as David says in Psalm 16:11.

A GOOD THING, GONE BAD

But now, in the "Now and Not Yet," we still live with desire gone wrong. Our hearts still desire pleasure, but we do not always seek it in the good ways God created for us. Where will our desire for pleasure take us? To God or elsewhere?

Pleasure is one of the most powerful forces in our lives. We love to feel good and to enjoy. When our pleasure is in God and His good ways, our desires can be a turbo-engine for good. But when our pleasure is in sinful things, our desires become a tractor-beam towards destruction. Let's look at what the Bible says about what following sinful pleasures does:

Sinful desires are a formidable enemy

> "But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." – Genesis 4:7

Our hearts are quick to rationalize what we want to do

> "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" –Jeremiah 17:9, NIV

Sinful desires lure us into sinful actions

> "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. "–James 1:14-15, ESV

It is part of the old man we still struggle against in our passions, bodies, and minds

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind."
--Ephesians 2:1-3, ESV

Following sinful pleasure can lead others (especially weaker, less mature Christians) into the same sinful traps

"Their [False teachers'] idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood! They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness.

These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for "people are slaves to whatever has mastered them."
--2 Peter 2

When we indulge in sinful pleasure, it doesn't only hurt ourselves and fellow believers, it is a rejection of God

"The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit." --1 Thessalonians 4:6-8

Continuing in Sinful pleasure is worshipping that which is not God

"Put to death, sherefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry." --Colossians 3:5

Following Sinful Pleasures Choke Out the Good Fruit God Desires

"And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature." --Luke 8:14

Beauty Is Fleeting and Charm Is Deceptive

"Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain." –Proverbs 31:30, ESV

THE TEMPTATIONS FOR PASTORS/THEIR WIVES

What tempting circumstances fan sinful desires for pleasure among pastors and pastors' wives? Different versions of relational and sexual sin. Here's the ones I've noticed:

Pornography
Many men struggle with pornography. And, with so many images so readily available through the internet, this can be a huge battle to win. You don't have to be looking for it, for it to find you… a bad choice of words typed into the search engine, the spam in your email, the sidebars as you surf the web for something totally benign. Add mobile phones and online movie channel subscriptions and you have

multiplied the allurements. And the double trouble with so much internet porn is that is can be accessed so secretly. Men can be drawn in and tied up in addiction and no one even know it. Pornography is a growing problem among women in recent years for the same reasons. (Great book by Garrett Kell)

(Im)Modesty
Summer can be especially tough on men in ministry. Such a parade of women who (usually unconsciously) do not realize what that cool, skimpy dress does inside a man's head! However, there are women with hearts hungry for attention who are tempted to use the beauty of their figure to draw notice from others. It doesn't even have to be a particularly provocative outfit. Sometimes it's simply so well "turned out" that they look like something out of a fashion magazine. This is a far cry from Paul's admonition in 1 Timothy 2:9-10 to be modestly dressed but beautifully adorned with godliness. As pastors' wives, this is particularly important that on both accounts we set a good example. It can be very tempting, even for us, to seek attention by how we present, perhaps especially in certain areas of the country, such as parts of California, where outward appearance is so strongly emphasized.

Relational Pleasures Outside of Marriage
God created people to be relational—relational with Him and relational with each other. Part of the relational way he made people is to "bond together," especially men and women in a pleasurable way. (What did God say in Genesis 2:18: The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.") It's like men are one side of Velcro and women are the other side. The longer and the closer they get to each other, the more they are likely to stick together. This stickiness is what is meant to lead to marriage and hold together marriage.

The tricky thing with the church is we are called to be brothers and sisters in Christ, yet most of us are not blood relatives. So, that stickiness of closeness can not only lead to the godly pleasure of marriage but also into the sinful pleasure of lust, sexual promiscuousness, dating without the intention of marrying, emotional and physical affairs, and adultery.

Being a Good Pastor, Without Making an Inappropriate "Connection"
The even trickier thing for our husbands is that they are often in regular relationships with many people of the opposite sex, as part of staff or as church members. They might have long work hours with staff women or have important counselling sessions with women church members in need. These are opportunities to do good, but they can also be opportunities for desires to grow in unhealthy ways. The compassion and care our husbands rightly show these women may be the honey their hearts long for. Men love to feel like providers and fixers. Can you see the temptations to both in counseling? So many affairs start out with no ill intentions and nothing but the best of relational motives. It's just that sin doesn't play fair. It entices, deceives us and drags us away so easily.

Divergent Lives
Pastoral ministry can require long hours, especially in church plant situations or when a pastor is newly on the job. Seasons like this, when your husband and you are more divergent in schedule than usual, can leave the door open to getting your loneliness filled with someone else since your spouse isn't around. Or, for your husband to grow an unhealthy relationship with a woman on staff sharing those long hours with him.

Entangled with Texts
The ability to hold text relationships makes it easy to be secretly tying your heart to someone other than your spouse. It can start with just a little message regarding business or "just checking up on what we talked/prayed about" and grow into a significant relationship.

RECOGNIZE THE ROOTS

This is a particular uncomfortable area to take a look at, but that also makes it particularly important.

- Does my husband or I struggle with lust?
- Are we over-busy and is loneliness setting us up to be tempted to fulfill good desires for companionship through others?
- Is my husband or I regularly meeting/communicating with someone of the opposite that puts us in a situation ripe for temptation, either in person, via phone/texts, or the internet?
- Is my husband or I tempted by pornography or "soft porn" images online?

TACKLE LIES WITH TRUTH

However 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.

Turn Your Heart to the Good Ways God Fulfills Your Pleasures

"Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." – Psalm 103:5

"Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart." --Psalm 37:4

Ask God to Provide a Way Out

"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. " – 1 Corinthians 10:13

Do Not Neglect Sex with Your Spouse

"Now for the matters you wrote about: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." –1 Corinthians 7:1-7, NIV

God Can Work in You to Will and to Work for His Good Pleasure

"For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." --Philippians 2:13

We Are Joined to God Through Christ. The Power God Used to Raise Christ from the Dead Is at Work in Us to Help Us Flee Immorality

> "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything… The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." –1 Corinthians 6:12-20, ESV

Dress to Point to God, Not to Point to Yourself

> "Women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, 10 but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. –1 Timothy 2:9-10, ESV

Remember How Fleeting Sinful Pleasure Is Compared to the Lasting Reward to Come

> "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward." --Hebrews 11:24-26, ESV

Fighting This Struggle Is Important that the Example of Our Lives Lines Up with the Preaching of God's Word

> "But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. "--1 Corinthians 9:27 ESV

Continuing to Grow in Godliness Helps You Fight Lust

> "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." –Galatians 5:16

Remember the Battle Has an Expiration Date! Keep Fighting!

> "The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh." --Romans 13:12–14

RUN TO GOD

Ask God to continue to grow your attraction and affection for one another. Ask Him to help you talk about any marital difficulties that impede your togetherness. Ask God to make the fleetingness of sin so obvious. Ask Him to show you the hungers of your heart and areas where you are tempted to fill them wrongly. Confess your struggles to God and ask Him to show you a way out as you fight temptation. Ask God to help your husband care well for the women of the church in wise ways that protects his heart and their hearts.

REACH OUT TO OTHERS

Confess your struggles to others. Encourage your husband to, also. Have them pray for you and hold you accountable. Ask them if they see any relationships you or your husband are in that need extra accountability or change in frequency or add in an extra person, etc. to protect you from being tempted to sexual/relational sin.

Meet together with a counselor, if necessary, to work through any marital difficulties that could improve your relationship and make it more pleasurable, as God desires it to be.

Have an accountability partner who will regular ask you how you are doing, set goals, ask awkward questions and pray for you. Have this person also ask your husband about his counseling sessions with women of the church? Does he have any on-going counseling sessions with women? Has he been able to have someone else present in those meetings? Has he developed any on-going text or email conversations with them?

ARMED AND READY

In the Moment:
Get to know when sinful pleasure is likely to "jump out at you" in the moment, such as when you surf the web, and make a strategy of what you will do. If your husband has difficulty with girls dressed immodestly at church, have him ask other pastors what they do to combat this struggle.

In Your Church:
Sin loves darkness, so add accountability and visibility! Our church has done this by putting glass in all the doors of our pastors' offices so that they and whoever they are meeting with can be clearly seen (but not heard).

Also, If a pastor needs to have regular meetings with a woman at church, they ask that another person (husband or another woman) be present. If a pastor or elder is asked to meet with a woman at her home, it is paramount that he does not go alone. It's not that we think all our husbands are chomping at the bit to cheat on their husbands. It's just trying to be pro-actively protective.

This is also why we employ a number of women counselors at our church. We let the same-sex relationships bear most of the depth and weight of counsel, with the pastors over-seeing the counselors' work.

Business trips out of town can be another source of temptation to guard against. Our church has made it a policy for a man's or another man accompany our pastors on such trips.

Hold annual talks for women on modesty and how they can help their brothers not struggle. Have a regular course on dating/courtship, including how to stay pure through the process.

In Your Strategy:
Encourage each other to speak with other pastors/pastors' wives how they deal with relational struggles and/or how to care deeply for church members of the opposite sex without endangering your relationship with your spouse.

Build in regular time off into your schedules! There may be seasons where the workload is especially consuming, but make those short. Do not coast along on your relationship's past health. Plan for its continued prosperity by making it a schedule priority.

Look into the apps that provide protective filters for phones, computers, etc. Share your electronic devices with your spouse for them to look through your texts, social media, emails at any time. Covenant Eyes is an app that lets your accountability partner (wife or another guy), know what your husband is looking at online. Texting, email, social media can also be a place where relationships can be formed "under the radar."

Read
Finally Free by Heath Lambert
Wired For Intimacy by William Struthers
Purity Is Possible by Helen Thorne
Pure in Heart: Sexual Sin and the God's Promises byGarrett Kell

REPENT ON REPEAT PLEASES GOD

With so much allurement all around us, it is no wonderful that it is so easy for sinful pleasures to take hold of us. This is a fight we will have to battle every day of our lives. And for some of our men, particularly, this will be so hard and so discouraging. Praise God for Christ's forgiveness! And praise God for His promise to help us get up and fight again and again.

YOUR MERCIFUL HIGH PRIEST

Struggles with sexual sin can lead to powerful addictions. It can be very hard to turn away from habits turned bondage like this. But Jesus our high priest is the sympathetic Savior. The New Testament is full of allusions to people who were formerly slaves to lust and sexual sin, trusted in Him as their Savior. The story of their continued fight is written of often by Paul. You are not alone, if you struggle. And the same Jesus who helped those believers long ago, is interceding for us today, to fight and one day--even if only in heaven—and be free!

Reaching Forward to God's Goal

> "Not that I have already reached the goal or am already fully mature, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. Brothers, I do not[c] consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly[d] call in Christ Jesus. Therefore, all who are mature should think this way. And if you think differently about anything, God will reveal this also to you.
>
> In any case, we should live up to whatever truth we have attained. Join in imitating me, brothers, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For I have often told you, and now say again with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction; their god is their stomach; their glory is in their shame. They are focused on earthly things, but our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of His glorious body, by the power that enables Him to subject everything to Himself." --Philippians 3:12-21, ESV

So, how do you feel after all these chapters dwelling on your sin struggles? Discouraged? Defeated? Frustrated? Overwhelmed? I don't know how you feel about the struggles in your heart, but I hate them! I understand why God says all of our righteousness are as dirty rags! Sin has infiltrated everything I do. And, It seems the more good I try to do or the more I try to fight, the more I feel sin's tug. Sometimes I just want to stop trying.

If pride seeps into something good I'm doing, maybe I shouldn't do it at all, I think. Won't doing more just be multiplying more opportunities for pride? Other times, I think my problem is that I need to up my game. Then I won't struggle as much. More Scripture memory; more prayer time, more, more, more to make my heart cleaner and temptations weaker. But still, even when I least expect it, once more creeps in those sinful desires looking to be gratified. What in the world is a person like me doing as a pastor's wife! What an ugly mess!

What to do? Who can help? Once more Paul's exclamation comes to mind:

> "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Romans 7:24-25

Jesus. HE is where we need to start in understanding to have hope as we take on this fight with the desires that long to be the gods of our heart. Because of Him, the victory IS won! We will end this section with a meditation on what He does for us.

Questions for You

1. How do you/have you desired pleasure?
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?

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

Victory Through Jesus: Our Sure Hope in Our Fight with Sin

Now that we have taken a good, hard look at the sin that loves to cling to our feet and bring us down, let's finish up this section with encouragement about all that God has promised to help us fight our battles and to bring us to victory through Jesus.

1. Jesus Died for Us. It Is Finished. The Victory Is Won.

> "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

Our salvation rests upon what Christ did for us. He has taken the full punishment for our sin in our place. We are completely forgiven and stand clean before God because of Him. He became our Savior when we were still sinners. He will stay our Savior, even though we are still sinners. Our standing is eternally strong, even though our struggle with sin remains.

2. Jesus Has Made Us Alive and that Makes Us Different. We Were Made for Victory.

Ephesians 2 tells us:

> "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ... For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

As God's people, we still know sinful desires and are tempted by them. We even give into them. Maybe even daily. But instead of "walking in sin", instead of "living in the passions of our flesh, instead of "carrying out the desires of our body" because we were by nature "sons of disobedience" and "children of wrath".

But now, we have been "raised with Christ, seated with Him in the heavenly places." We are different. We have new desires. Yes, they may seem weak against the old desires that have grown strong and skilled from years' of practice. But these new desires are new life. They are our future, thanks to God!

> "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!
> --2 Corinthians 5: 17

God gives us the immeasurable riches of His grace. The grace of faith through by which we were saved. And the grace of good works, by which He helps us to do all He planned for us. We are here for a different

God gives us the immeasurable riches of His grace. The grace of faith through by which we were saved. And the grace of good works, by which He helps us to do all He planned for us. We are here for a different

3. Jesus Is Our Example of Fighting Sin.
We Know What Victory Will Look Like

"Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." 1 Peter 4:1-2

Peter tells us that Jesus's life sets the example for our lives. Though tempted in every way, just like we are (Hebrews 4:15), Jesus said "no" to sin every time. He had come to do God's will. He would not veer away from the plan for any easy out or temporary pleasure. He would live a perfect life. He would be the perfect sacrifice to pay our sins and suffer in our place. Jesus chose to fight the good fight against sin that He might win for us.

Now God wants us to take up arms like Jesus, not to pay for our sins, but to fight to live for God instead of our old desires. This will be hard! Our desires are our first-nature. They are deep-seated. To leave them unsatisfied will be (and feel like) suffering. The fighting will be fierce. Sisters, this is war, but it is worth it. We will get knocked down, but with God's help, we can get up again! Let's follow Jesus' example and forge forward in battle.

4. Jesus Has Changed the Trajectory of Our Life.
We Are Headed towards Victory.

1 Peter 4:1-2 says:

> "He who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God."

That doesn't mean quite as it sounds. "Suffering to "cease to sin," is speaking of the trajectory of your life, not that you will know "one-and-done" victory over sin in your heart if you have suffered enough or in the correct way. Peter is talking about the fact that you aren't being carried downstream on the raft of your sinful desires, but you are getting off that raft, jumping into the cold water and slowly, but steadily, heading upstream against it, by God's grace.

God, through Paul, promises:

> "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." --Romans 5:1-3

This will be a life-long battle against sin, but because of Jesus, we have been turned towards victory. Our fighting is full of hope!

5. Through Jesus, God Planned Us Our Salvation and Transformation. Victory Is Providential.

God knew us and chose us to be holy even before the first "Let there be" came out of His mouth! He chose to save us and to make us holy and blameless in His sight:

> "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight."
> -- Ephesians 1:4

Such Good News

How amazing! I was dead. He loved me and brought me to life. He wants not just to give me a hope and a future for this life, but to bring me to be with Him forever so He can show me the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness in Christ. I lived in the passion of my flesh, but he has raised me and giving me good works to do. And because I'm his workmanship, he will see that they are done.

6. God Has Set Limitis on Our Individual Struggles. Victory Is Particular.

> "Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them." --Psalm 139:16

Surprising Good Works

The pre-planned good works God gives us are not one-size-fits-all. They are custom-built for the frail frame He gives each of us. And with such love and care, He prepares us for these good works and them for us. But even in such careful preparation, God did not just choose the good works that phrase often brings to mind, such as caring for the sick, sharing the gospel, encouraging one another, etc. it also, quite clearly includes suffering.

> "Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong." --2 Corinthians 12:8-10

Good Work of Weakness

I love these words from Paul. If showing off Christ's power in our weakness isn't a good work, then I don't know what one is!

Good Work of Struggling Against Sin

I've come to see that even part of those good works he has me do not just the good works that we think of his good works such as being kind to somebody sharing the gospel with them, outward things that we all know to be good. But part of that good work that he's doing is the work in me. It's his workmanship. From Psalm 139 he knew me before I was born. From Ephesians I know he loved me and adopted me before the foundations of the world. And here in Ephesians 2 I know that at that same time he created good works for me to do even in my frail fallenness.

Favorite Words from Paul Tripp

This quote from Paul Tripp is on the white board in my office. I think I got it from his book, Broken Down House. Its truth has been so helpful to me: "I do not write my own story. It has been written for me. My job is to live inside of the plot that God has written for me in the way that I have been called by him to live."

Not a Sidetrack, but on the Superhighway

Fighting sin is something God is in charge of. Something He's planned. It's not just a sidetrack that keeps me from doing what God wants me to do. It's actually part of the main superhighway of good works He's given me to do during my fleeting life in this fallen world.

7. Transformation Will Come as We Keep on Fighting. Victory Is Won, Battle by Battle Fight, Not as One, Big War

> "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand… Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" –Romans 7:15-21,24-25

Those words from Romans were the apostle Paul! Oh, that I could be like him in his godliness! But even this godly man faced persistent pain of suffering and persistent struggles with sin. Fighting isn't just for failures. It's for all of God's people as part of God's good plan to grow them during their days in this fallen world.

Good Days and Good Fighting Days

Fighting sin glorifies God. Fighting to trust him. That glorifies him. And he uses the struggle to transforms us through the process.

Many sin struggles do come back over and over again. This can be so discouraging. As someone who frequently struggles with anxiety, I've found it so helpful to remember that the fact I'm fighting against sin is part of being victorious. I like to think there are only two kinds of days: good days and good fighting days. And who's to say which is more glorifying to God! Fighting for His glory against my sin might the winner!

I love looking at the passage about the manna in the Old Testament. The Lord gave them bread from heaven every morning--enough for the whole day. Yet He let the leftovers melt off by mid-day. And, only on the day before the Sabbath could any extra be gathered and kept maggot-free for the next day. And remember: this is out in the wilderness where there are no other food options. God intended for their "safety" to be something they would have to come back to Him for day after day after day… for forty years. If that's not a lot of battles, I don't know what is!

That wilderness was no mistake. God made every day a training ground for fighting the lies of fear and distrust. And they had to go back and fight over and over again.

This was the Lord's good purpose in their struggles:

> "And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." --Deuteronomy 8:3

Paul also sees this life as one of striving in a life-long race for the heavenly prize that he will receive. Exertion. Struggle. Setting down what lays behind and straining forward for the next day. All for a very good purpose—a very good prize:

> "Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you." -- Philippians 3:13-15

8. The Transformation Will Be Dramatic. Victory Will Only Come with Great Help and It Is Promised.

God asks for outrageous heart and life changes in His people. Here are just a few:

- "Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."
- "Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves."
- "Do not repay anyone evil for evil."

Giving up your lives to serve God as living sacrifices? Loving and honoring others more than yourself? Blessing and being kind to our enemies instead of retaliating? How can we live selflessly like this, when we are so frequently tempted to do what serves ourselves? Even though these commands seem so impossible, we need not be discouraged. God would not ask them of us if He did not plan to give us what we need to do what He wants us to do. He raised Jesus from the dead. He knows how to bring about dramatic transformation! Even in us!

God's Power to Help Us Is Great

> "I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead." --Ephesians 1:19-20, NLT

Did you catch that? The same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in us! He gives us the power to turn away from the temptation to serve ourselves and to serve others instead!

God's Prayers for Us Are Effective

If you could pick just one person to pray for you what it not be God? Everything is yes and amen that God prays for us. We know it is according to his will. We know it will take place in his perfect timing. We know he knows what we need more than anyone else. He lives to intercede for us. He knows to pray when we don't. That's why we can even just pray help and we know he'll take it from there with the kind of help we need.

> "Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." –Hebrews 7:25

> "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." --Romans 8:26

God Helps Us Even on the Inside

God's Holy Spirit lives and works powerfully within us. He is our Helper.

> "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."
> -- 2 Corinthians 3:18

> "For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me." --Colossians 1:29

My fight against sin is powered by God, Himself! This means our very fighting, even if it is wobbly and weak, is pleasing to God. It is on the vehicle God has chosen for much of our transformation.

9. God Will Use My Transformation to Transform Others. Victory Together.

God will use my struggle fully. Not just the end product, but every part of the process along the way. God does not know how to waste anything. Not even my struggle with temptation and sin. Every skirmish of this war is part of the good works he's prepared for me. Every skirmish will not just grow me to be more like Christ but will help me comfort others with the comfort I received from God. And that brings him glory not just at the end along the way.

This is one of the greatest ways we can be a good model to the other believers in our churches! We fight the same struggles they fight. We help each other learn how to fight better. We are encouraged as we see God help us fight and win. We know who we can go to when we are discouraged with our failures. God can and will use it all!

> "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.'"--2 Corinthians 1:3-4

10. God Has Set an End Date on This Struggle Against Sin. Victory Will Vanquish All!

> "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place[a] of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." --Revelation 21:3-4

The battles against sin may be fierce, but the victory will be won, one day, once and for all. won.

Until then, we can be confident that God will never stop helping us until we are formed into the image of his Son. Part of that forming will take place here on earth in those good works God has prepared for us. Ah, but the beautiful rest will come as quickly and completely as our salvation.

> "Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when he appears, we will be like him because we will see him as he is." –1 John 3:2, CSB

Come, Lord Jesus, come. And until then, keep fighting, girls. And keep helping your husbands fight, too.

Two Parting Pep Talks

From "Coach David": Remember Who's Got Your Back

> "With [God's] help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall…It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure. He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You make your saving help my shield, and your right hand sustains me; your help has made me great. You provide a broad path for my feet, so that my ankles do not give way.
> --Psalm 18:29,32,34,35

From "Coach Hebrews": Keep Your Eye on the Prize

> "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted."
> -- Hebrews 12:1-3

You go, girl!

Questions for You

1. How does remembering Jesus' victory helpful for you/your husband's struggle with sin?

2. Do you have any other words of encouragement for people weighed down and discouraged over their sin?

From Section 5: God's Good Portion: Finding Contentment Together

Psalm 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."

The Clean Plate Club

Have you heard of the "Clean Plate Club"? It was a phrase used by our family (and others) to encourage our kids to eat all of the food on their dinner plate so that they could qualify for dessert. Our kids were not always happy members of our Clean Plate Club. We sometimes gave them food they didn't like, even if just tiny bits (spinach… yuck!) But it was a helpful incentive to get their dollop of "slimy greenness" past their taste buds in order to get cake and ice cream that lay ahead.

David's Clean Plate Club

David was not a perfect man, and he faced many difficulties that neither seemed like a "pleasant place" or a "delightful inheritance" at the time. And yet, we see him here, as in other of his psalms, finding his contentment in God and what He has chosen for him. And in my mind, this makes David a member of God's Clean Plate Club. He could see God's goodness to him; and, he trusted God had his good in mind, even in the trials.

David didn't like trials any more than we do. But he firmly believed that God chose a circumstance for him, he would consider it "pleasant" and "delightful," because knowing God and obeying Him was David's "cake and ice cream." "Apart from you I have no good thing…. You alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure," David says in this psalm. What a foreshadow of Jesus, the perfect Son who delighted in always doing God's will, even when it was suffering on the cross for the sins of God's people. "Not my will, but yours be done," Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane.

But David was not the only one whose life was woven with blessings and trials even before they were born. He's not the only one whose boundaries have fallen in pleasant places and who has a delightful inheritance. This is true for all of God's people. Like David says in Psalm 139, God also "created our inmost being." (v.1) His eyes also saw our unformed bodies; and all the days ordained for us were written in His book before one of them came to be. (vs.13,16) As Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:10: "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Only before it is written does a story have no boundaries. The ideas are swimming around in the author's imagination saying, "Pick me, pick me!" The plot is yet to be decided. The options are limitless. But as soon as ink hits the paper, the story takes shape, and boundaries appear. How wonderful that God tells us that from before the beginning God wrote our stories and that means he chose our boundaries, too. I love how Paul Tripp puts these truths altogether. He says, "I do not write my own story. It has been written for me. God calls me to live within the story that He has written for me, the way He calls me to."

As one person put it, contentment in the life God gives us comes as we:

- **Acknowledge God's authorship** — Recognize that He is the one who both knows and has planned your life's story.
- **Rest in His purpose** — Trust that every event, even the difficult ones, serves His plan, for your good and His glory.
- **Live within your God-given design**— Align your choices, values, and actions with His calling.

Even though God has written our stories from cover to cover, and HE knows it all, there's much that WE don't know! Even the chapters of our lives that we can leaf back through and "read" already, there's much of its full meaning we do not know. Yet, because of God's Word, we know where the story is going and we know that the boundaries are good. And actually, they aren't just good, they are best. God always knows what is best and does what is best, for our good and His glory.

That's why, like Paul Tripp says, our business is living in the story in the way calls us to live, not writing the story… or trying to re-write the story. And praise God, He is not just author, He's the main character in it. He is always with us, living in us, giving us grace to live in the story as He wants us to.

What makes our stories even more amazing is that God hasn't just written separate stories for our husbands and for us, but He has always planned for them to be woven together "until death do us part." And as pastors and wives, He has planned for our stories to also be intertwined with equipping the church. We can be confident that as we seek the Lord together that He will give us grace to help our families flourish even as He is also calling our husbands to nourish their local church.

This is such an important concept to begin with before we turn to the practicalities of living well within the boundaries of ministry life. To know that while there will be so many decisions and sacrifices we will need to make, God has already planned out the weave of our stories together, full of good works. Together, we can seek the Lord, in prayer, through His Word, and through His people, to learn His plans for us and know with confidence that He can give us the wisdom, fruitfulness, joy and contentment to live within whatever boundaries He chooses.

From Section 5: The Good Portion: Finding Contentment Together

Psalm 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 sent 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, Absolom, 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.

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

"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." Psalm 16:5-6

A Blueprint for Balance

Every Christian couple can look to God's Word for boundaries and for help to live out the story God has written for their lives, but for pastors and their wives, God actually wrote in a bit more to help them. And that's a very good thing, for without His help, my life as a pastor's wife feels like a boundary-less black-hole of needs to be met and desires to be fulfilled. I'll show you what I mean.

Here it goes:
- I'm a person, with my own set of wants and needs, with limited amount of energy.
- Married to a man who wants my help in meeting many of his own wants and needs.
- Parenting children who want even more of my help meeting many more of their own wants and needs.
- Surrounded by a church of other people wanting me to help them meet their own wants and needs.
- Surrounded by a world of other people needing to know Christ, as well as wanting me to help them meet their own wants and needs.

Wow! Was pretty overwhelming, doesn't it? It makes the familiar panic feeling rise in my heart, then comes the cry, "I CAN'T DO IT ALL!!!!"

And what is God's kind response to me when I start to get sucked down this black hole version of life? It is: "you are absolutely right, you can't do it all, because you are not God. I am. So stop trying! What I want you to focus on is living contentedly within the boundaries I give you, rather than auditioning for my job."

Now this may seem simple enough for me to get that I am not God and shouldn't act like I am. I'm certainly not thinking that you are having difficulty getting us confused! But honestly, when you hear or see a need, especially one that either no one is meeting or that you might be especially able to me, aren't you tempted to jump right in and take care of it… Even if your plate is full already? I am. And then comes the crash, not too long afterwards, when I'm in tears again because it has all become too much and I completely overwhelmed… And usually forced to back out of something.

And who suffers? Not just me, but my husband, my family, the other obligations I should be taken care of, and often the very person I hope to jump in and help. And let me tell you, I am not looking anything like content within the boundaries God is given me… For, of course, I've way overstepped them.

But there are so many needs! And perhaps as pastors' wives, we get to see even more of them than others, since we are so closely connected to our husbands and their ministry. That makes it all the more important to be careful in what we get involved in.

But fortunately, we don't have to live the boundary-less, black-hole life. We have God's truth and God,

Himself to give us wisdom. We have husbands to lead us as we seek a blueprint for balancing ministry and family well.

Blueprint for Balance
You have a lot of decisions to make to balance ministry and family life well. You will be weighing obligations, opportunities, needs and dreams. I wish our lives could fit them all in! But no, there's those boundaries of time, energy, and budget that we bump into over and over. Furthermore, no two ministry families have the same boundaries. You can learn from others, but you will have to custom build what's best for your family.

That's why, I'd like to share with you some tools that have helped us to build, (and re-build), as our family, seasons of life, and ministry have changed over the years.
1. Knit Your Hearts
2. Know Your Flow
3. Keep Coming Back

Let's take a look at each.

Knit Your Hearts: Marriage-Shaped Ministry

A Pastor Is:
A man who not only leads and loves his family well, but nourishes the church as a godly leader. He shepherds his congregation by teaching, correcting and guiding them according to God's Word. He provides a example for them, in his life and in his leadership at church and in his family. He knows himself to be a sinner saved by faith. He sets not a perfect example, but a good and godly example of what it means to live as one of God's people among God's people. To depend upon Christ's strength, to be transformed by the Spirit, and to keep heading towards that Day where we will all stand before the Lord. Through his preaching and through his example he helps prepare God's people for that day, too.

A Pastor's Wife Is:¶
The just woman who married the pastor. She's not a position. That means, like any other wife, she does well to let the Proverbs 31 "book-ends" shape her life:
Bookend #1: "She longs to do [her husband] good, not harm, all the days of her life (v.12).
Bookend #2: A woman who fears the LORD is to be praised (v.30).

But as a pastor's' wife, longing to do her pastor-husband good cannot help but include supporting him in the ministry. She will be an indispensable part in helping him both NOURISH the local church with God's Word, and FLOURISH his family at the same time.

Marriage-shaped Ministry
Put this altogether and you get what Mark and I call "Marriage-shaped ministry. Marriage-shaped ministry is ministry in which our husbands nourish their local church, but within limits that provide the pastor and his wife/family with the time they need to flourish, as God as planned. Caring well for each other and our children and our family is not a second-class sideshow, to the work the Lord calls our husbands to do as pastors. It is part of the main "act". Actually, a man's promise to love his wife and their family takes precedence over pastoring. If something has to go, it's being a pastor. As my husband says, "The church can always get another pastor, but I'm always supposed to care well for you."

Start Out Together: An Ocean of Agreement

Boundaries mean limits. Limits mean decisions. There will no doubt be disagreements over where some of these limits fall. It can be easy to get up in each other's face and shake fingers at each other: "You want this… but I want that…" Most ministry couples have a few "great white sharks" of disappointment swimming in the pool of marriage and ministry. Instead of attacking one another, take a swim together in the "ocean of agreement." Remind each other of the many good things you already agree upon and desire to do.

The best and happiest decisions come from unity. Unity comes with minds and hearts knit together in understanding and purpose, grounded in God's Word. Too many times, we leave the things we agree upon unsaid and that allows the issues we disagree upon to grow bigger and our hearts to harden. This ocean helps put your difficulties into proper perspective. It helps you turn from being opponents to being comrades who work together to figure out how to shrink those great whites down to minnows.

Things you probably agree upon:
- You both long to see God glorified.
- You both long to see many come to faith.
- You both long to see God's people grow.
- You both know God has a plan for your life in ministry and He gives wisdom freely.
- You love your husband and want him to do well as a pastor.
- You want him to have time to prepare and preach God's Word well.
- You both want him to care well for the members of the church.
- Your husband loves you and wants to care well for you/your family
- Your husband does not want to neglect you or your family.
- Your husband does not want the ministry to be an unhealthy place for your family.
- Your husband appreciates you and the sacrifices you make to support him in the ministry.
- You both want to spend time together as a couple/family.
- You both want to encourage each other to grow closer to God.
- You both want to have friends.
- You both want to use your home as a place of hospitality.
- You know that this is a best guess plan and adjustments will be needed.
- You both know that he is new to this job and it may take time to get into a regular rhythm.
- You both know that sometimes the pastoral ministry involves emergency meetings.
- You know that you will both need to forgive each other when you fail to get the balance right.
- You both know that it will take God's help over and again to get the balance right.

These are some of the points of unity you might come up with. Thank God for these points of unity. Ask Him to help you to work as a team as you build a schedule.

Even if the points of unity seem obvious, take time to say them or write them down. Thank God for them and ask Him to guide you to love each other well and to make the best decisions for your family and your husband's job as pastor. God can use these to grow an attitude of comradery as you get into the nitty-gritty of your schedule.

Some of the most helpful words my husband has said to me are summarized here:

"God has made me your head to love you like Christ has loved the church. I want to love you that way. I will need help loving you that way, because you are very different from me. There are times when I will choose something for our family that doesn't immediately seem best to you, but I will not do

those lightly and I will only do that after listening to what you have to say, too. God has always meant for you to be part of his wisdom for me. And when we disagree, let's agree to pray about those things and even seek the counsel of others who we respect to help us see things more clearly and to know what God would have us do. I want to love the church well, but I want to love you well, too. I need your encouragement and your help to do both of these things."

Some of the most helpful words I've said to my husband are summarized here:

"God is made you to be my head and I want to support you and serve you and submit to you. I want to make your job a delight. I want to be an encouragement to you. I want to see you do well at this church. I want to be a part of helping you love our family well. Sometimes submission is hard and scary. But when you listen to my opinion and take it seriously into consideration on points where we at first disagree, that makes it a joy to submit to you. And when you are willing to seek the counsel of others on important points that we disagree upon, it makes me respect you even more."

Go with the Flow: Sketching Out Your Schedule

There is only one way to God, but there are lots of ways to sketch out a schedule. Some people will go into great detail, while others fly by the seat of their pants. The more moving parts in your life, the more detailed you will probably need, otherwise you will be miscommunicating, over-booking, or under-estimating ministry and family needs. As empty-nesters now, Mark and I come closer to flying by the seat of our pants. We know so many of our regular routines and there aren't all the kids' activities we used to navigate. But for much of our life together, we have needed a more detailed calendar of events to keep family and ministry in balance.

I'll leave it to you (or the school of hard knocks) to figure out how much detail you need. However, if you are new to the ministry or new to marriage, it would be especially useful if you get something like a big wall calendar that will show the whole year at once, but also give you room to write details under each day.

You can also print out separate months and paste them on a piece of poster board (or just lay them out on the table as you talk).

And grab yourself a pencil with a FULL ERASER, and let's get sketching!

1. Map Out Your Husband's Job at Church

If your church gives your husband a job description, this can be a great place to start. Some churches with larger staffs have particular office hours as well as regular meeting times (such as members' meetings and elders' meetings) that fall outside those office hours. Add in weekly services and any other regularly occurring job obligations. These can form a baseline for when you know your husband will regularly need to be at church.

Next, add in any other typical patterns to your husband's needs for personal devotions and prep time for sermons, Bible studies, etc. Can these needs be met during church office hours or will they require time outside of work? If any time outside of church hours is needed, are there times that he is obligated to do these or typically does these?

Church Office Hours
- Service Planning
- Staff Meetings
- Other Regular Meetings
- Preparation for Worship Services

After Hours Meetings
- Elders' Meetings
- Committee Meetings
- Lunches with Members
- Informal Conversations

Teaching God's Word
- Sermon Prep
- Bible Study Prep
- Sunday School Classes
- Weddings and Funerals

Guiding God's People
- Counselling
- Visitation
- Praying
- Hospitality
- Discipling
- Emergencies

Trips
- Convention Meeting
- Elders' Retreat
- Mission Trips
- Youth Group Retreats

2. Put in Your Family's Needs

Now, turn towards home. Be warned: family needs can be a bit harder to get a handle on. And, depending on "history" they can be explosive as to who does what. Stop and pray before you delve into this section. Ask God to help you both see what your family's needs and how to make the best balance with your husband's ministry. Remember: you are seeking to work together to help your husband manage and love his family best. Things to put in or at least talk about might include:

Survival
- Sleep
- Rest
- Exercise
- Food
- Special Health Needs

Spiritual Food
- Quiet Times
- Family Devotions

Fellowship
- Couple time at home
- Couple time date night/overnight away
- Couples time with other couples
- Ladies'/Men's Night Out
- Birthdays, anniversaries, holidays
- Family fun time
- Time with individual kids
- Family meals
- Visiting Relatives

Household Chores

Wife's Work (outside the home, if you do)
- Your work hours
- Your after-hour work obligations

Kids' Stuff
- Kids' activities
- Homeschool/School/ Carpool/Homework help
- Volunteer Hours (at their school, etc)
- Sports/Music practicing at home
- Meeting the kids' friends
- Bedtime Stories and Prayers
- Devotions/Catechism
- Caring for the Kids
- Discipline
- Church Services and Activities

Re-charge Time
- Regular Days Off
- Vacation
- Time with Friends
- Enjoy a hobby

Wife's Ministry
- Discipleship
- Children's Ministry
- Women's Ministry
- Outreach
- Music
- Counseling

Do Some Landscaping

Take a good look at what you've penciled in. What is missing? What would you like to spend more time doing? What patterns do you notice? How well does ministry and marriage fit together? Where are the rubs? Is there any way you can relieve some of them? How can you help each other? Use that eraser to make changes that mesh ministry and marriage together better.

Try not to get into a fight over this. Remember that communication is the first step towards unity. Don't forget all the things you agree about. If you start to get upset, try not to accuse the person of not caring just because they don't see something as the same priority as you. You aren't clones of each other. You are different. Respect each other and try to come to an agreement. If something is more important to your husband than you, try to accommodate that priority; just like you want him to do that with something you value as more important than him. And usually, it's not that you disagree on something's importance, but how much time should be spent on it.

You may be helped by bringing in some outside help if you are overwhelmed, confused, or just plain upset. You will be especially helped if you can find an older ministry couple or at least a couple who as more ministry experience. Everyone faces this balancing act. Might as well get some help from the wisdom of others.

It can be especially hard for men to ask for help. The same, very admirable quality of confident decision can also carry with it a blindness to see a need for help. You may need to be very winsome in asking him who he respects who could look over your schedule and talk to you about it. Do not do this in a degrading way! If nothing else, after any conversation with that outside couple, don't forget to encourage him for being the kind of man who seeks advice to make the best decision for his family and his ministry.

Start Your Engines!

You've worked together to build your best guess at a schedule that is nourishing to the church as well as flourishing to the family. Now it's time to try it out and see what works and what doesn't. And believe me, there will always be things that do not go as planned.

I don't know if you saw any of the Pirates of the Caribbean movies, but I find I still regularly quote a line from the first movie, released almost 20 years ago. Elizabeth Swann is captured by the pirates and tricked when bargaining with Captain Barbossa, the "head" pirate. and declares "parley" giving her the right to a fair bargain. Elizabeth cries "unfair" when Barbossa, the Captain pirate, tricks her and smirks, "The code is more what you'd call 'guidelines' than actual rules." I don't know about parley or pirates really, and I'm not encouraging you to trick your spouse. But, like Barbossa I want to emphasize: these suggestions are guidelines more or less. Take them or leave them, according to what is useful to you.

This calendar is NOT:

- Your new Bible.
- Based on crystal ball-like knowledge of the future.
- A guarantee for contentment.
- Proof that your husband/wife doesn't care if he/she doesn't follow through.
- Rationale for future lynching of your husband/your wife.
- The final word on your schedule.
- A blueprint for the rest of your lives.

This calendar IS:

- A snapshot of what your lives look like now (at least on the day you created it).
- A tool to help ministry and home life mesh well.
- Can help you support your husband and him to care well for you.
- Can help you love each other better.
- A great thing to pray over and ask for God's help.
- A source of encouragement for the things that are going well.
- A breadcrumb trail to show you where your time is being spent to help you become even better stewards of the lives God has given you.
- To help you glorify God through good stewardship of the people He's put in your life.
- Something to take seriously, but still can only be a guideline, more or less.

Keep Coming Back: Listen and Learn

Conversation Checkpoints

Once you have your calendar penciled in, there's a number of helpful checkpoints you might use to help you shape your schedule into something even better. Bring a gracious attitude to these meetings. Ask Him to use them to shed light on the path He wants your family to take. Ask Him to not only help you formulate a good plan forward, but to make the very process a chance to show each other love. Ask Him to protect hearts from selfishness and mouths from unkindness. Ask Him to help you have unity, and where there isn't immediate unity, appreciation and respect for the other's perspective. Thank Him for always being faithful to give wisdom when we ask Him for it.

Checkpoint #1: Weekly Check-ins at First

At first, you may do best with a weekly check-in time. Compare what you thought your week would look like with what it did look like. Discuss what happened. What was good about what happened? What didn't go as you would have liked or had planned? Was it because of one-time events you couldn't predict (such as everyone came down with the stomach flu), unrealistic scheduling, or some other reason. What do you know you should re-shape in your schedule now? What would be good to wait and see if it stays the norm?

Checkpoint #2: Monthly Check-ins

After a few weeks, you will begin to discern patterns of what happens and why. The one-month point gives you four weeks of "data" to make some good re-adjustments. Major on humility, patience, grace, and encouragement as you talk about the month. Let it be ok that there's a learning curve to this. Remember: the goal is to work together toward the common goal of loving your family well while loving the church well. You agree on this goal! Work as a team to get better!

Checkpoint #3: Annual Check-in

Book a babysitter for your kids, grab the previous year's calendar and go out. This is like a physical and a Thanksgiving celebration all in one. You review the past year and how the family-ministry balance is going. Praise God for what has gone well. Ask Him to help you re-adjust and do better with what needs to improve. Find reasons to encourage each other. Set goals for the next year.

Adding in More

There is nothing "one and done" about our lives! Just when you think you have everything accounted for in your schedule, new opportunities or needs arise. Here are some tips to help you with these add-ins.

Adding in More: My Invitations

Are you a "yes" addict--someone who loves to say "yes" to people? "Yes" addicts can quickly un-balance the family-ministry balance with their quick yeses. I should know…. I am one. Here's what we've learned over the years to keep from feeding my addiction:

When asked to do something or when I'm thinking about starting something new, I avoid all sorts of trouble if I remember to ask myself these two questions:

1. What affect will this new obligation have upon supporting my husband and the callings upon his life—at home or in church?

2. Will this new thing help me be more content or less content within my support of him?

- If the answer is that it might be harmful or his callings, or it make make me discontent within my support of him, then I say "no, thank you" to this new thing, right then and there.

- If the answer is, "I'm not sure. Can I get back to you? I better talk it over with my husband first."

- If the answer is, I think it would have little or even a good affect and is a short-term obligation, I very likely will say yes. But, if it is something that involves a longer term commitment or a one-time, big chunk of time, the answer is still, "I'm not sure, can I get back to you? I better talk it over with my husband first."

Adding in More: The Kids' Invitations

Sometimes it's not my opportunities, but the children's opportunities that can cause a major un-balance in our lives. Perhaps your gifted swimmer gets invited to be part of an elite swim team that not only has nightly practices, but swim meets many weekends. These require you to take him to and from practice during dinner time on weekdays, not to mention transportation to and sitting through the day-long meets.

What does saying "yes" to this activity do to the balance of the rest of your family's as well as your husband's schedule? Yet, how difficult to say no to a once in a lifetime chance like this? This example may be on the more extreme side of a child's activity un-balancing the rest of your life, but it does happen, especially in the junior high/senior high years.

Other times, it's not any one child's activity, but the fact that all the children have different activities and you are trying to keep your head on straight, while getting everyone where they are supposed to go. Having regular schedule check-in's can help you assess when you need to pull back for the long-term good of the whole family.

When your children come to either you or your husband asking permission to participate in something, follow the same guidelines you use for your invitations: "Let me ask your father. We need to talk about this together." Avoid, if at all possible, setting your husband up to be the "bad guy" who says no after you have already said yes. Been there, done that!

Adding in More: Your Husband's Invitations

My husband isn't a "yes" addict like me, but many great ministry opportunities come his way—everything from a last-minute pastor friend coming in town needing a place to sleep and a meal to share, to invitations to go to Australia to speak to pastors for a month. He, too, has learned to talk to me before saying yes to opportunities like these if they involve out of office time or my preparations at home, and certainly if they involve overnight travel.

A Committee for Clarity

The "yes" addict in me really has a hard time when it comes to my husband's gospel opportunities. Either because I'm so excited about an opportunity that Mark has; or, because I feel like I'm being a "gospel blocker" if I say a certain activity is too much to add in for me/the kids. On top of that, the church feels its responsibility to balance Mark's time at the church with other gospel opportunities around the world. If he were to take them all, neither our family or the church would see him as we should.

So, the elders/pastoral staff came up with a great idea: form a committee to review Mark's (and the other pastors') invitations to speak outside the church. They committee review all speaking engagement requests. They have a set of priorities that help them decide which opportunities they suggest Mark (or the other pastors) to take and which ones to decline. This set of priorities includes our family's needs, our church's needs, whether the request involves speaking to lots of pastors (right on target for Mark), whether Mark would be uniquely suited for the opportunity, and length of time he would be away. Many requests never make it past this committee. They help Mark love his family and our church well with their advice.

Making Final Decisions

However, a good number of requests are approved. Mark brings these to me along with his calendar to think about together. "So, what do you think?" he says as he reads me the description of the month long trip to Australia and shows me how it sits in the calendar. I ask him a few questions; see what comes before and after this trip; weigh in other things, such as my chronic health condition, and of course, the kids' needs (when they were at home).

Then the tug-of-war begins. Everything in me wants to say "yes" to the gospel opportunity... but my body is doing poorly. A month is such a long time. Shouldn't I always say yes? Isn't it not trusting the Lord if I say no? And so goes the battle. I feel like a hindrance to the gospel if I say no.

But the truth is, Mark doesn't need me to be a yes wife, just like he didn't need that committee to be a yes committee. I'm his helper. His support. I'm to help him know the weight this trip would put on the family. Is this too out of balance? This is marriage-shaped, family-shaped ministry. He needs my honesty to lead in the shape of love and good stewardship. Sometimes I say "yes." Sometimes I say "no." I always try give him my best assessment of what would be good for the family. This is what he needs from me to lead us well.

So there you go! Hopefully, you and your husband have come up with a basic plan to try out as you begin a lifelong journey of trying to flourish the family as you nourish the church.

If you are looking for more wisdom from the school of hard knocks, carry on to the next sections:

- **Advice from the School of Hard Knocks**
- **Limit Liars: Halving, Doubling Your Husband's Ministry and Other Measurements of Success**
- **Ministry Potluck: 10 Tips for Balancing Your Ministry and Family Life Inside the Church Doors**
- **Labor Lengthers: Ways to Make More of Your Limited Time**
- **A Host of Ways to Be Hospitable**

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."

Advice from the School of Hard Knocks

There's nothing like learning the hard way to knock some sense into your head... or life, in this case. Here are some things we've learned that may help you incur less bumps and bruises!

1. Take Frequent Beach Trips

Remember that "ocean of agreement" I mentioned in Mark 1? Keep going back to it to avoid fighting. Communication is the first step towards unity. Don't forget all the things you agree about. If you start to get upset, try not to accuse the person of not caring just because they don't see something as the same priority as you. You aren't clones of each other. You are different. Respect each other and try to come to an agreement. If something is more important to your husband than you, try to accommodate that priority; just like you want him to do that with something you value as more important than him. And usually, it's not that you disagree on something's importance, but how much time should be spent on it.

2. There's No One, Single Recipe that Fits Every Ministry Family

If only learning how to flourish your family while nourishing the church was is straightforward as a simple cake recipe, how wonderful that would be! Just open up your cookbook to the chocolate cake recipe, grab your ingredients from your cabinet, get out your mixing bowl, measure them all out, slap them in a pan, tuck them in your oven, and in 30 minutes you've got your cake.

But the truth is, every ministry situation is different. And every couple is different. That means the combination of what your husband does in ministry and what you all do as a family is going to look different. And not only that, but it's going to change as your church changes, as your family changes, as you and your husband change. So, whether you're reading a book like mine or somebody else's, or looking around at other ministry families you know of, or listening to a podcast about how to do this nourish and flourish thing, realize that the best anybody can do is tell you what they have learned, then encourage you to go make the best cake you can for your family and your church.

By all means, look around, read around, and listen around. There will be many of the same ingredients in your family-ministry cake as there are in others, and that means there's so much you can learn from others. But as one of my fellow pastors' wives says, "You're going to take some and you're going to leave some" in order to get to the best-balanced version of family–ministry life for your family.

3. See and Respect One Another

Both your husband and you bring special proficiencies to your marriage and to your life in the ministry. Do yourself a favor and acknowledge these special proficiencies. Try to be especially open to the opinion of the one who has more experience, while leaving room for the less experienced persons opinion be heard, valued, and weighed.

And when you have to make a decision in which neither one of you has much experience or expertise,

seek counsel from others those who have experience/expertise that you both lack. You might need help with the budget. You might need help with the kids. You might need help thinking through hospitality. You might need help figuring out how to carve out regular time in the bedroom. Everybody needs help with something. Be kind and patient with one another! And put on humility over everything.

I mentioned back in Chapter 2 Mark's Humorous Way of talking about his overly confident decision-making ability: "always confident, sometimes right." Men who are strong leaders very often have a natural tendency to be strongly opinionated that they are right. Years of experience in life helps soften that a bit, at least it has in Mark's case. When we first got married Mark's quote might've been closer to: "always right." But it didn't take too long for him to begin to add in that: "always clock confident" and see that sometimes he was right, but sometimes I was right.

My husband's assuredness has been a great gift to our family as well as to our church. But the growth in humility and openness to carefully weigh my opinion has also been a great gift to our family as well as to our church.

My problem hasn't been being "always confident". I've been a classic empathetic, deep feeler, intuitive sort of gal. It's not that I don't care about the facts. I do. It's just that how someone feels modifies and colors my decisions, sometimes in good ways and sometimes in bad ways.

When we are able to recognize we our both wearing a different set of lens going into a decision it helps us to recognize not just each other's blind spots, but our own blind spots. Prayerfully, we ask God to give us one vision that combines both sets of lenses. And if we can't come to a decision, we often seek outside counsel. And if outside counsel isn't enough to come to a good decision, then we let Mark guide our family, trusting in the Lord giving him grace to lead us well.

An example in our lives was the decisions we made about how to school our children here in D.C. Education was not an easy, straightforward path through the neighborhood public schools for our kids. We used Christian schools, private, secular schools, homeschooling, and even online education. Each time we made a decision to change, there were many different factors to consider. Mark and I often saw different factors of greatest importance. On our own, we would have made different decisions.

But since I was the one who spent so much time getting to know the teachers, helping our kids with their lessons, and read so many books of education, Mark recognize the experience/ expertise I had and let my understanding of our kids' needs way more heavily into what we decided. But on the other hand, I was emotional about these decisions that Mark was not. We may have needed my expertise/experience but we needed his clear thinking to make the best decisions for our kids.

4. "L" Stands for "Lifetime Learner", Not for "Loser"

You will always be a learner at something. Always. Yes, you may have a common attitude and a common vision. But each of you will always have certain things that are hard for one or the other of you. Don't kill each other over this! Expect it. Be honest with each other about your weaknesses, appreciate each other's strengths, and strategize together. And laugh, laugh, laugh! Enjoy each other for a lifetime of learning.

5. Seek Out Advisors

"For by wise guidance you can wage your war, and in abundance of counselors there is victory."
––Proverbs 24:6, ESV

Be a Winsome Asker

You may be helped by bringing in some outside help if you are overwhelmed, confused, or just plain upset. You will be especially helped if you can find an older ministry couple or at least a couple who as more ministry experience. Everyone faces this balancing act. Might as well get some help from the wisdom of others. It can be especially hard for men to ask for help. The same, very admirable quality of confident decision can also carry with it a blindness to see a need for help. You may need to be very winsome in asking him who he respects who could look over your schedule and talk to you about it. Do not do this in a degrading way! If nothing else, after any conversation with that outside couple, don't forget to encourage him for being the kind of man who seeks advice to make the best decision for his family and his ministry.

One, Special, Designated Couple

Most every marriage has times when husband and wife just cannot come to agreement on important matter. Find a couple who you both respect and ask them if they would be your designated "guardian couple" who you can go to help you think through the matter and settle your disagreement and come to a decision. Having somebody like this set up well in advance of the difficulty makes it so much easier to come to a decision in the moment.

Other Ministry Couples

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.

If you 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.

6. Twirl with Your Swirls

There will be something in your schedules both on the ministry side and the family side that are fairly immovable. And then there will be a lot of things that have a lot of flexibility. It helps to identify those things that are like pillars and then learn to make the other things twirl around them.

For instance, say you are trying to figure out the best time to have quality alone time with your husband or as a family. There may be times in the week when your husband will be especially distracted, such as when he is in the middle of writing a sermon. These would be the kind of times not to expect quality together time. Much better to wait to a time when your husband is able to give you his full attention.

For my husband, Sunday nights and Monday's feel like his Friday nights and Saturdays. He's finished good but long day of preaching now it's time to relax and get ready day off on Monday. Those are two of our best times for quality togetherness alone or as a family.

Many men also need a little time to unwind before fully engaging with you and the family after a day at work. Planning for him to take an extra 15 minutes at the office, giving him time to put his feet up in his study, or take a run might cut your evening a little bit, but great improve the time you do have.

7. School and Saturdays

One of the biggest pillars in your family's life that you will need to navigate around in 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-curricular 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.

8. Learn What Works Well and Stick to It

You will find your husband and you each 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 to 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.

9. 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 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 schedule's 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 is 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 the evening.

10. 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 its seem 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 that 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 recognize 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 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 there 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 l

ove 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.

11. Encouragement Works Wonders

Two people with very different needs imperfectly met can naturally be recipe for disaster. But throw encouragement into the mix and you help each other want to do a better job at meeting each other's needs. And complaints can be replaced with gratitude. Make the most of even small attempts and improvements with your encouragement and you may be surprised how those small beginnings multiply into bigger attempts and bigger improvements.

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

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

"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." Psalm 16:5-6

Ministry Potluck: 11 Tips for Balancing Your Ministry and Family Life Inside the Church Doors

Potluck Sundays! Yum! Yum! At least, my kids certainly thought so. There was rarely anything green and vegetable-like to eat, and usually their favorite macaroni cheese and hot dogs, not to mention the desserts. They sat with their kid friends and we sat with our adult friends and it was a good time had by all. In honor of fellowship and (lack of green) food fun, I present you with 10 tips on balancing ministry and family life, over at church.

1. Cooking in Front of a Studio Audience

One of the great benefits for each ministry family to come to their own version of balance, is that it provides different godly examples for all the families in your congregation. Remember: nourishing the congregation isn't just through the preaching from the pulpit. It's also observing your husband leading and caring for his particular wife and his particular kids. There's going to be some people who will be so encouraged by looking at how Mark loves me and leads our family. And there will be others who will be far more encouraged by looking at the example of another elder/pastor in our church and how he cares for his family. It helps the congregation know that there's also not going to be just one cake recipe for being godly families within the church, either.

2. Some Food Doesn't Taste Good, No Matter How You Cook It

After 30 years in ministry here at Capitol Hill Baptist Church, I can say that Mark and I had learned a pretty decent balance between ministry and marriage. But there are some things even after all these years, even after we've done the best we can, that is just hard. It's not because we're doing them wrong; it's just because it's what they are. I don't think I will ever enjoy sitting alone most Sundays in the pew. That doesn't make it wrong. It's part of us choosing to be in the ministry of him preaching to the congregation.

My husband's study is on the second floor of our house. And while there is a separate staircase that goes directly up to that study, there are dozens of people other than my husband in our house almost every single day, able to hear almost everything going on in every other part of the house. This makes it hard when I am vacuuming or playing music and he is trying to record a podcast. When I'm having a hard day and feel like crying, I have to think about where in the house I can go and not be heard. There are many times people don't use Mark's special office staircase, but come right into the regular part of the house. Privacy is not high in commodity here, and it rarely has been.

Sometimes I wish his study was over at the church and we didn't have so many people in our household all the time. Sometimes I'd like a bit more privacy. But we both agree that what we've chosen to do is best for what God has called us to do. So though sometimes I don't always like the "taste," of so little privacy, I would rather eat it than not. We do come back to this topic from time to time when I am overwhelmed. Mark is always willing to figure out a new way to use our house so that I feel comfortable in it. But so far, every time we both have come to agree that this way is best.

So, what do you do with the food that don't taste good even when it's cooked right? You season them! Butter, sugar, salt, and cream can make almost anything taste good. Putting spiritual seasoning on the things in ministry that you know you have to eat, but don't like, helps, too. Seasonings are thankfulness for all of the ministry that is taking place in that second for study. Remembrance of all the times those same men invading my house are the ones who brought in my groceries or helped me do some other chore that I needed help with. In sharing the house as we have, these men have become like my sons. And don't forget the seasoning of eternity: remembering that these little inconveniences we suffer we know now can bear eternal fruit.

3. Make Good Plans, But Expect Emergency Substitutions

More times than not, Mark and I know what his schedule is and can plan around it. I typically know what his office hours are, what nights elders' meetings going to be, when he's going to be preaching and prepping his sermons when he travels to speak at conferences and the other parts of his schedule that are very predictable. I have a pretty good sense of how many hours a week he is going to spend at the office and out of the office in ministry-related duties. It helps to be realistic about what this regular schedule looks like.

Together, we need to decide if it's too much or if it's a good fit for our family. And when we make the decision that it's a good fit, even though sacrifice will be involved, it's important that we can be, or ask God to help us become, cheerful about that reality. Nagging and complaining about the basic lay of ministry land that cannot be fixed by shifts in schedules or better communication, points to the question of whether ministry is a good fit or not.

No one likes to feel that they are the reason why their husband quit the ministry, but us being basically cheerful about what her husband is called to do is part of what her husband is called to do. Without it, he cannot come in the gospel to the church and certainly before God. It's a terribly difficult conversation to have, but one that is very needed. And sometimes it does turn out that a few more schedule shifts make all the difference. But sometimes marriage -shaped ministry, means stepping down from being a pastor and continuing to be a part of the church as a regular family.

Cheerful realism about your husband's calling no doubt will also include the last-minute adds to his schedule. This is hardest when your husband is the only pastor and they're not even any lay elders to help him. It's the difference between being a sole practitioner OB/GYN doctor who is responsible for delivering every baby in his practice in contrast to a practice of partners. Somebody has to be on call 24 seven. Emergencies and other after-hour needs can't help but arise. And if your husband is on his own (without other pastors on staff or a plurality of elders), guess who all of these needs fall upon?

This is another aspect of the ministry that you need to carefully consider for the health of your husband's ministry and your family. On one hand, pray for God to raise up others who can help cover these contingencies, so they don't fall all on your husband. Be wise about the impact frequent unscheduled meetings or visitations are having on your family. Try to see if there's some way these can be moved to regular business hours or at least more convenient times for your family, such as after the kids have gone to bed instead of right during the middle of dinner time.

Get the advice of other pastors. Find out what they do to juggle these unscheduled calls. But on the other hand, ask God to grow a cheerful heart in you that encourages your husband to help those in need and that trust God will help you and your family in his absence.

4. Sharing the Load, Training New Staff

The encouragement of other ministry couples on the outside can go a long way in helping your husband and you persevere under the ministry load yourself. But sometimes the ministry load itself can change and change in ways that not only make what your husband does more doable and share the support you give him but makes for a stronger church. What tonic could do this? Does it sound more like snake oil than a real possibility to you? Well, if 30+ years in ministry has shown me anything, what I'm speaking of is no snake oil. It comes down to our husbands equipping members of the church to share the load, as pastors, deacons, and deliberate disciplers/encouragers of one another.

For example, your husband is called to feed God's people with God's Word. But as he's feeding the sheep, he can be training others to learn how to feed the sheep, too. Does he lead the public worship services every week? He can begin to train others to lead those services well, too.

He is supposed to get to know the members so he can know how to lead them and love them well. He can encourage them to get to know each other through deliberate, transparent conversations at church and by inviting each other into their homes for hospitality.

Your husband will always have a special calling to serve your church, as pastor. But that doesn't mean he is supposed to be the only one who does this. The New Testament is filled with admonitions of how God's people are to build each other up with God's word and in love. Even in the Old Testament, you see Jethro encouraging his son-in-law, Moses, to train up men under him to help bear the weight of leading the people.

Do you see how there is training potential for almost everything our husbands do? They can encourage and equip the congregation to care for each other in many of the same ways as he is caring for them. This biblical strategy helps the church grow strong and thrive. It also grows the church's compassion for the ir pastor as they strive to build one another up, and see how complicated it can be.

Raising up a well-equipped church is not only best for the church, but it's best for the pastor and his family, too. It helps them be able to thrive even under the pressures of the ministry. It moves the church away from the pastor being the sole source of spiritual growth to him being the catalyst for spiritual growth within the church and frees him up to care well for his family even as he is caring well for the church.

5. Changing Portion Sizes

Sometimes ministry swirls fall so frequently outside of regular office hours that there just isn't room for another twirl time for your husband and you (or your family). This is especially true for those men who spent a lot of time counseling. Two things that our pastors have done here at CHBC has been to encourage members who want to be counseled to take time off of work to meet during normal business hours. They wouldn't ask a doctor to meet them after business hours, and so in the same way, they can ask for time off for an appointment for counseling. (Of course, I'm not talking about emergencies. That's a completely different matter.)

But if they do have regular counseling time scheduled outside of normal office hours, or even a special obligation, such as they lead youth group on Friday nights, they have been given extra time off during normal office hours, such as a Friday morning or a Monday morning. This has been a great way to care for those in need of their time after normal office hours while replenishing time available with their wives/ family.

6. Change in Venue, Change in Menu

Changes in staff, changes in congregation size, changes to another church. These are just three of the common changes your family will deal with in the ministry. And with each change, comes a time of transition. Be patient with each other, especially when the changes are fresh. Expect these changes to come with a heavier workload as your husband is learning how to cope with it. I like to say that there are "places where we visit and places where we live." That is, when we are in a transition time, our husband's extra work hours are fine during a reasonable period of adjustment and we need to help them navigate our family through this unusual season, but it's important that it doesn't become the long-term norm. If no reasonable end is in sight, then we should pray and work together for a change for the better.

And if your change is a move to a new church, it helps to remember that it's more than just ministry that has changed. Your whole family will be adjusting to new friends, a new community, a new culture, and even a new language. Be extra patient with each other as you make your new to new-normal. And, beware of blaming everything hard you might be experiencing on the church when really there are so many other changes that are making life different. Keep connected with old friends as you work your way to new friends. Find other families with kids the same age as your kids for play dates. Get recommendations from others as to where to shop or go to the doctor. Getting these basics to life in place can help you establish your family more quickly in your new setting.

7. You, A Church Junior Chef

The smaller the church or the more classic the church culture, the more likelihood there is that the pastor's wife may find herself being expected to be a leader of a ministry or being asked to be a leader of a ministry. The benefits as well as the costs of you being a leader of a ministry in the church where your husband is pastor can be great. Go about this very carefully!

The Benefits

The benefit of you being a leader in a ministry, such as Children's Ministry, Women's Ministry, is it provides other church members an opportunity to see you humbly support and look to your husband and the other elders for the vision for that ministry. And, as someone who probably understands your husband's vision for that ministry better than anyone else (just because of your proximity to hand and years of knowing his heart) you're in a great position to help that ministry be shaped by his vision even though he's not currently part of it.

If you're a small church, you can be a great encouragement to your husband to know you will be an instrumental part of shaping that ministry in a way that will be edifying to others and in line with his vision. With so few hands-on deck, you may be one of the few people, especially in the early days of his ministry, that he knows he can have confidence in the direction it's going spiritually and theologically. If you're in a church with what I call a classic church culture that very well expects a pastor's wife to tackle Children's Ministry or Women's Ministry, again, you being an integral part of the leadership of that ministry can help your husband know what's going on and do a better job of leading it as he informs your leadership.

The Costs

As great as these benefits might be, the costs for pastors' wives in leadership positions can be even greater. Finding a ministry-family balance gets far harder with two ministry leaders with busy ministry schedules in the family. It also can perpetuate the idea that the pastor's wife is the unpaid, extra member of staff the church gets when they call their pastor. It can encourage members to see themselves more as consumers who receive benefits from the church's ministries but do not seek leadership or ownership of them.

8. The Wisdom of a Waiting Period for Wives

Pastors and their wives need to think extremely carefully about these costs and benefits before they encourage their wives to take on ministry leadership. This is especially true when they are brand-new to the church. There is so much they don't know about the church or the members. To jump straight into ministry without knowing the dynamics can be pastoral suicide. Far better for you and your husband to have a response on hand for those eager to see you take on ministry leadership soon after your family comes to the church. Something like, "thank you so much for asking me, but the best way I can serve you right now is to help my family get settled in well and take some time to get to know the church before I assume any sort of leadership. And I sure would appreciate your prayers for our family during this transition time."

This waiting period may seem like a luxury that pastors of small churches and especially church plants feel like they cannot afford. But remember: it's always easier to add something in later than it is to pull back. Finiteness is something that's not going to go away even with the pastor's wife taking on a leadership position. Fill these first needs, the new needs are going to come and take their place… Rapidly.

Keep your head and think carefully about what will be best for the church in the long term. If you're in a church plant, you are probably starting out with a small team of others who you know. The pastor's wife filling a leadership role in this circumstance is not the same thing as a pastor's wife filling a leadership role in a church that is already been active. She, as well as your whole family, is already known to the whole team.

One of the most helpful things that your pastor husband and/or the elders can do for both you and the church, if you are considering a leadership position, is to formally ask you to fill that position. This helps ensure that your husband and elders are thinking through your fitness for that leadership position as well as carefully considering whether the time this position will require of you is a good fit, given your even more important role in supporting your husband as wife and mother. This also makes it clear to the church that you are being asked to take this position because the elders' /congregation's desire this, not just because you're married to the pastor.

If you do take on a key leadership role within a ministry at your church, always be on the lookout for others who you can train up to do what you do. You want to always be working yourself out of a job, even if you keep the job. This is a great model for the rest of the church and it strengthens the church to care well for its members. And, it leaves you in a more flexible position should the needs of your husband and family change and you need to step down.

9. Sous Chef Extraordinaire as a Church Member

You help your husband's ministry thrive simply by striving to keep you make with the other members in your church. You try to attend the worship services regularly, you try to raise your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and help others, just like all the other members. You try to encourage other members of the church to grow in their knowledge of God and to live out their life for him and each other in their lives. You pray for each other and you care for each other's needs. You give support the ministry of the church. You seek to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others, just like the other members.

How does this help your husband's ministry thrive? First of all, because you are doing the very things that helps the Body of Christ grow. The more members of your church deliberately tried to live out the church covenant the stronger your church will be. Second of all, because as you are doing these things, you become a second set of eyes and ears and hands and feet within the congregation, living out the covenant in a knowledgeable way.

Few men or women in your congregation understand your husband's good plans for growing your local church better than you, simply because you are so closely connected to your husband. This gives you a wonderful opportunity to help others understand better what he has in mind by your example and in your conversations. And it may also be a way for your husband to learn through your experiences, how he needs to better clarify or guide congregation in these good plans.

This is especially true among the women in your congregation, I have found. Out of carefulness, women do not have the same opportunity for regular, one to one, deep relationship with my husband or any pastor of the church. there may be plenty of conversations that comes with a couple that meets with my husband or another pastor. Or, there may be counseling sessions with a husband and wife or at least with a single woman and a woman counselor meeting together with one of the pastors. There is plenty that can be shared in these kinds of meetings. But nonetheless, me being a woman serving and encouraging other women in our church, simply as another member, has been extremely helpful to my husband better understanding the women of the church and trying to care for them well.

The importance of this, seemingly simple and basic form supporting my husband at church became clear within the first six months of our marriage. We were having one of our "fun" disagreements in which I was sharing a problem and wanted sympathy and he was trying to fix it.

We had made it past the argument phase and the silent treatment phase and the tearful phase and it come last to the heart-to-heart reconciling phase – – that point when you stop being mad or hurt that the other person isn't like you and you get to explain without judgment what you were thinking or feeling. It was at that point I told Mark: "I don't need you to fix it. I don't want you to tell me what to do. I just want you to hug me." He was shocked. He thought about it for a minute, then said, "Do you mean to tell me that when I'm preaching to a congregation, that I should tell half the congregation what to do (the men) but I should just go hug the other half (the women)?" he asked. I laughed and, but said, "Maybe." He laughed, too.

Neither one of us have forgotten that conversation and it's importance. Mark needed help understanding how better to pastor women and I could help him do that. Many times since that day, his ministry to them has been helped by me simply being a woman among the other women in our church. Sometimes, it's helping them better understand him. Other times, it's helping him understand them.

A Plain Ole Person

Another way just being a faithful church member helps your husband's ministry is it shows to the rest of the congregation that you are no different from them in what you're called to do, you need grace to do all this being just a plain old person. But a plain old person in a high-profile position. It's so good for others to see you living under the authority of the elders and within the finite limits of your life under the loving care of your husband. You need God's Word just like everyone else. You're not superwoman and you're not supposed to be.

If the elders have set limits on how frequently someone is to serve in Children's Ministry in order to make sure they are getting well fed themselves, you live within those limits, too! Perhaps you're a great Children's Ministry teacher. Perhaps you are your church's BEST Children's Ministry teacher. Perhaps you are your church's ONLY Children's Ministry teacher. Just because you're the pastor's wife that doesn't mean you have the spiritual strength to miss most Sundays preaching in order to teach the kids.

Perhaps you and your husband agree that there's time in your schedule to meet up with one or a few ladies in a discipleship relationship, but there's not time to meet up with twelve, then you live within that

limit. It doesn't matter that you're the pastor's wife and perhaps most every woman in the church would like to meet up with you. You are called to be a faithful member, caring for your husband and your family number one; and pouring into the lives of other members, number two. Not to mention you might have a job, number three, or other obligations, number four. You are to be faithful with what you can do. You do get to model finiteness, not infiniteness.

These are just two ways pastors' wives are prone to sacrifice too much. Seek out good limits with your husband and live within them. You cannot be a strong church by yourself. You can only be one faithful member among many.

10. Surprise!

Acting like a only faithful member can be surprising to other members. Especially in cases where there is sensitive information your husband knows about them or they want him to know. Many times, members have come up to me and begin talking about their personal issues in a way that assumes my husband has shared with me everything they've shared with him. When I look like I have no idea what they're talking about, they're a bit taken back. I explain to them that I'm just another member like them. My husband only rarely shares confidential conversation with me.

Sometimes, people are a bit disappointed that I don't know what's going on. But mostly, it gives them a respect for Mark's leadership. It's a reminder that my husband is their pastor, not me. He's the one that they were going to for counsel of the special nature. It is not unless they share those things with me, then I will be giving them counsel. Only if they ask my husband to share with me (and he feels it will be not too much of a burden for me to bear) would he share their problems with me.

There are also times when church members come to me first with the question and more likely with the complaint to pass onto my husband, treating me more like his personal secretary or another staff member than just the woman he's married to. In cases like this, we have found it very helpful for me to say something like, "This sounds like a really important matter, but I'm not going to be much help to you in this. I think it'll be far more helpful if you talk to my husband or one of the other elders. They're the ones who will know how to think this through."

I say this even if I might have some good thoughts on the matter because it helps church members treat me like another church member and it helps them know that they should go to their pastor (even though sometimes he seems a little scarier than me to talk to). This allows me to be a part of teaching other church members not to complain about an issue, but to go directly to their leaders with their concerns. This is my favorite way of being a faithful church member who encourages my husband's ministry, but it is surely an important one.

11. Quitting the Restaurant Business

Sometimes ministry is too much. The sacrifice is no longer a place that you "visit" but where you live and it is affecting your relationship with your husband, your relationship with your kids, your relationship with the church, and even your relationship with God. You've tried and tried; you sought advice; you've made changes; you've been as faithful and as wise as you know how to. But it's still just too much. This is when you and your husband need to talk about whether the ministry he's involved in now, or the ministry in general, is too much for your family.

There have been times in our ministry when Mark has asked me this question: "Is this too much for you? The church can always get another pastor. I am called to love you and care for you first. Do I need to resign and find another kind of job?" I have felt incredibly loved by him for noticing the strain upon me

and choosing me over dear Capitol Hill Baptist Church and all the work he's put into the ministry here. The answer for me each time has been, "no, it's not too much. Let's keep going. Let's work this out."

But through the years, a number of men we know have found that marriage -shaped ministry meant leaving the ministry. Sometimes, because the ministry was not a good fit for them. More often, ministry was not a good fit for their wives. That's why my husband always says to single men headed towards the ministry, "choose your wife carefully. It takes a special wife to be a ministry wife. And you will be her husband before you will be anyone's pastor. Find someone to share the ministry life with you. For once you're married, caring well for her (and your family) will be the biggest, most important shaper of your ministry."

Coming to decide that enough is enough for you and your husband is a huge decision. It's one, in a sense, that should always be on the table. But one that is never come to lightly, never spoken of lightly, and is best arrived at through the wise counsel of others who know you well.

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

"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." Psalm 16:5-6

Labor Lengtheners: Ways to Make More of Your Limited Time

1. Bringing Home the Bacon… and Doing the Dishes

Behind that household of relationships is a household of practical needs-- the bones of our household. Someone needs to buy the groceries and make the meals. Someone needs to wash the dishes and wash the close. Someone needs to fix the sink and mow the grass. Somebody needs to pay the bills and do the taxes. And if time were an infinite commodity, the decision as to who does what in your household could be made on aptitude alone. I'm good at this; my husband's good at that. Let's go through the list until everything is portioned out. Check. Household needs taking care of.

But of course, time is anything but finite. Sometimes the person who has the most aptitude isn't available. Other times, no one either wants to do a job or is any good at it. And is much as were told not to cry over spilled milk, I certainly know of couples who have cried and fought over who should clean it up. "I cleaned it up last time. It's your turn to clean up this time."… "You're gone all day at church, and you've got meetings back there again tonight. I am exhausted from being with kids and cleaning up after them all day. Could you at least clean up this milk for me?" etc.

Team Work

It's true. There are only 24 hours in a day and 7 days in each week. There's nothing we can do to lengthen our limits that way. But we can work smarter as husband and wife, as we tackle the practical chores of life. And that smart teamwork can maximize the time we have for more important family and ministry opportunities. Grab your football, shoulder pads and cleats. I feel some sports analogies coming.

Teams Have the Same Goal in Mind

How can we split up household chores without dividing our hearts? Thinking as a team helps a lot. Was the first question you ask when playing a game for the first time? Isn't it: "How do you win?" If it's football, your goal is touchdowns. If it's baseball, your goal is home runs. Same thing with your household team. You need to your goal so your team can work together towards a victory.

The goal of our household was this: Taking care of our household's "bones" (needs) in a way that gets everything done, doesn't strain anyone, and maximizes our time for what's most important: our household's "heart" (couple time, family time, personal time, and time for others in and outside of ministry). Just verbalizing this goal can be really helpful. No longer do you have to depend on the classic "50–50 split" of the workload or and "you do this because it's man's work and I'll do this because it's woman's work" decision model because that's what seems "fair." Your team has its goal and is looking to win. You can work together to split up your household's needs however is most effective to get there.

Set up Your Playbook

Now that you have come up with your goal, you have to set up how you are going to get there play-by-play. This means thinking through what your household's needs are and figure out who's best to do them, given your goal.

For instance, my husband is great with dishes, but he's super slow (he would say he's super thorough, and he might have a point there). I can do dishes lightning fast. Usually, we choose for me to do dishes because we would rather get through the dishes more rapidly and have time for a nice long walk before he has to go to an evening meeting.

On the other hand, my husband is out most days for lunch. He frequently takes a grocery list along and picks up whatever I need on his way back from his lunch. Or, if there's some other errand I need running that he could do, he grabs one of the guys he's discipling and they go together and do my errand and get a good chance to talk, too. Not only does that free up my day to do other things I need to do and saves my bad back from carrying the groceries, but it even lessens his after-work ministry time. That gives us more time together as a family.

When our kids were little, Mark put a reminder on his schedule to come down and play with the kids, or help me in some other way, while I was working on dinner. It made my dinner prep easier (bones) and it also took us towards one of our goals: time for him with the kids.

These are a few plays from our playbook that have helped our team work well to get to our goal. The plays in your playbook will be as custom as your family and the needs of your household.

Add in New Plays

One of the hardest things about goal setting has to do with that phrase "what needs to be done." Differences in preference or degree of acceptable housekeeping are frequently what makes this so difficult. Some husbands or wives prefer a spotless house. Others might not mind a mess here or there. They care far more that the bills are being paid on time or that there's clean underwear to put on in the morning. No two people are alike so if you can come to joint agreement of tolerability with household chores you've accomplished a lot.

Throw in a change of life like a new baby and the level of housekeeping tolerability your playbook is based upon will probably need to change yet again. Your goal of caring well for a sleep deprived mother is more important than doing the dirty dishes in your sink. The same is true for your husband. Perhaps he usually does the bills, but there's been a particularly big issue boiling over at church that's kept him away from home more than usual. You two choose for him to play with the kids when he gets home and you find time to pay the bills while he's away that his meeting. Housekeeping preferences give way to loving relationships by mutual agreement.

Sign a Free-Agent If You Can

Free agents are outside players you add to your team to make it stronger. One of my favorite free-agents I've enjoyed over the last few years is someone to help with the cleaning of our very large Capitol Hill rowhouse. Not only does this save me time so that our house is ready for the almost constant onslaught of visitors and church members coming through our house, but it saves my bad back from going out yet If there's one thing "our team" has learned, it's vital that THIS member does not go on the injured list if at all possible. I hate writing the check to the cleaning ladies! As I'm filling out the amount, I'm thinking all the other ways I'd rather spend that money. But their work saves my back. And if the goal of our team is to have good couple time, good family time, good friend time, and even good personal time as well as be better available for whatever we do at church, this is a good play for our team.

Cleaning service may be a luxury your budget doesn't allow, but perhaps you have a young, married or single girlfriend who would love to have time with you. Invite her over to clean alongside of you or do some other chore that you need to do. Not only will this multiply what you get done, but it is great for your friendship.

I have another friend who loves to garden but has very little gardening space at her house. She comes over, weeds my garden so I don't hurt my back, and we have a great time talking. I think my husband is the master of free agents. He's always in listing one young guy or the other to come over and help him do whatever chores or errands we need done.

Call a Timeout

When teams face an important opportunity or the game just seems to be getting away from them, they will often call a timeout. This allows them to rethink their strategy to turn the game around and come out with a win. Chances are the first set of plans you and your husband make to get all your household chores done so that you can spend better time together as a family, will not be your last set of plans. Life is constantly changing and with it will come in need to reassess your strategies. Some couples can get away with sporadic, informal conversations about how effective they are at meeting these goals. Others do better by setting regular times to reassess.

If you can talk about these things without getting upset with each other, or if you don't feel bad asking for more help, you may do just fine with informal conversations. As for myself, I have a tendency to feel bad at asking Mark to add something else to his already busy plate. Setting regular times to tell him my needs makes it much easier for me to ask him for his help. Or, you might not have any trouble sharing with each other, your tendency might just be that life gets so busy that things get overwhelming and you wind up arguing about things that could have been dealt with calmly had you scheduled a regular talking time.

Be on Alert for an Interception

While Mark and I, probably like most couples, have found a fairly workable division of labor, we try not to treat our chore lists like a contract between the labor union and management. Instead, love and helpfulness is the tone. Perhaps there's something Mark usually does, but I know he's having an especially busy week and doesn't have time to do it. I look for a way to "intercept" that household chore, so he doesn't have to do it. That helps us get to our goal of making better use of the time he does have. I'm not talking about a pattern of laziness or procrastination. I'm not talking about forgetfulness either. You may need to figure out how to kindly prompt each other to do chores that are frequently forgotten. These are all issues you'll have to talk through.

Celebrate a Good Play

And Just because someone is supposed to do a chore doesn't mean we forget to say thank you. Most people would rather not do household chores. We have much to appreciate how chore tending helps our whole family. Show your gratitude to each other for what you do!

Cross-Training

Some pastors' families have only to think about juggling household chores between a husband who is working as a pastor and a wife who is staying home with kids. That can be complicated enough. In other families, the wife is working outside of the home as well as her pastor-husband. And most difficult of all, is when the husband is a seminary student who also works, or a bi-vocational pastor who leads a church as well as having another job on the side to pay the bills. This makes it even harder to figure out how to get all the household chores done and find enough time for quality together time.

These situations take even more deliberate planning since there is less margin for both household chores and for family time. It will be very important to regularly assess how the family is doing on both accounts and reevaluate regularly. It will take grace and time to learn how to best juggle everything.

But if even with grace and time, your household needs and especially your together time are not being well tended to, then you need to have a conversation about how sustainable your life is like this. If the wife is working in order to make ends meet, her pastor–husband may need to share the strain on the family caused by their budget shortfall. It could be the church is unaware of the need and can help.

If the husband is a working seminary student, they may want to seek out extra support from friends or families or the church that sent them out. Because so many seminary students have families and feel the strain, there can develop the attitude that we just have to get through this without looking carefully at the cost upon your family.

It may slow things down, but taking less classes can provide the extra time that families need to survive. Mark plan to get through seminary in three years, but the schedule was too hard on our family. We decided to take an extra year and it made such a big difference.

If the husband is bi-vocational, the church very likely does not have additional money to give his family. Their only source of financial help might be outside fundraising and support from a sponsoring sister church. Many find the strain of bi-vocational ministry to be so great that by the three-year point, they face a crisis in their ministry, their health, or their family. This is a short-term ministry model, not a long-term one.

Good PR (pastoral reminders) for the Sports Fans

If you have children, marriage and ministry means you have a set of watching eyes most of the time. How you care for each other whether it's through doing household chores or making a priority of together time, sets a huge example for your children. It shows them that your marriage and your family are not in competition with God just because you are in the pastoral ministry. It shows them that because you love God and He loves you, your marriage, and your family, there will be a pattern of deliberate time you spend together. This deliberateness can have a huge impact on what they think of the church. It certainly did on our children. Go team!

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

"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." Psalm 16:5-6

A Host of Ways to Be Hospitable

1 Timothy 3:2: "Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach…"

Cooking with Casseroles: Hospitality, Where Ministry and Home Mix

According to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, hospitality is one of the qualifications for our husbands being elders/pastors. And because this is one of the most significant cross-overs between ministry and home, it deserves a session of its own.

Now you probably have some sort of stereotype of what hospitality in the pastor's home is "supposed" to looks like. Generally, there's a spotlessly clean house and some really good food involved. This is often when the sweat starts forming on our brows: will our housekeeping and cooking be up to the required standard? But the truth is, biblical hospitality isn't about being an award-winning housewife or cook. It's really about love, and though I know I didn't need to tell you that, it's nice to be reminded.

Hospitality in the Bible

The Bible word for hospitality in the New Testament is philoxenia— literally, love of strangers. One of the reasons why hospitality was so important in New Testament times, was that there were very few inns where travelers could stay, and many couldn't afford to stay in them even if they were available. To make things worse, it wasn't always safe to just camp on the side of the road. These were known to take advantage of those who did this. That's why travelers would literally knock on the door of someone's house as sunset approached and ask for them to take them in for food and shelter for the night.

In the Old Testament, God's people were encouraged to show hospitality to strangers, and not just to those who are traveling through the area, but to those who were settling in your area. (See Leviticus 19:33 – 34). In the Gospels, we see Jesus and his disciples almost entirely dependent upon this kind of hospitality as they traveled from town to town.

In the early church, this continues as believers were urged to open their doors to each other (and especially so traveling preachers like Paul and Barnabas could be cared for), but also as places for believers to gather to worship, since there were no church buildings. Far from the idea of showcase, biblical hospitality meant welcoming someone into your home, not unusually unannounced, and offering yourself and what you have to serve them and to honor God.

Hospitality Today

Fast-forward early church hospitality up to today and what do we find? There are some fairly straightforward overlaps, but in the United States where I live, there are a lot of differences, too. Sometimes it still may mean welcoming someone to stay in your home overnight, but rarely a complete stranger, infrequently at the last moment, usually planned. Most often is welcoming your home for a visit, with or without the meal. Sometimes that visit might be an impromptu one like in Bible times, but many are scheduled in

advance. And, while many churches across the world have their own church building and are legally allowed to gather there, there were other places where Christians still rely upon meeting in homes like in the early church. And even when believers don't meet in homes for a main worship service, they still frequently use them for Bible studies, small groups, and other means of encouraging each other in God's word.

Perhaps the closest biblical version to what we most commonly think of as Christian hospitality today is found assumed behind the church life we see in the New Testament. Where would older meet with younger women to teach them Titus two principles for life? Where would the widows be provided food by the deacons like Philip? where did groups of believers gather to pray and to encourage each other to love and good works? The answer is the same: in homes. Or perhaps a la Deuteronomy 6:7, It would be as they come out and go in, to and fro through their daily life.

But whatever category of biblical hospitality our modern-day hospitality most closely emulates in form, it fails to serve the biblical purpose it was meant to serve if it is a showcase of our perfection, rather than a portrait of the gospel.

Showcase Hospitality

"Showcase" is the word that sums up what biblical hospitality isn't in my mind. On the outside showcase might mean presenting a perfectly clean house, perfectly behaved kids, and perfectly hot, steamy, homemade meal. The conversation is pleasant. the table manners are impeccable. The children are quietly seen and never interrupt to be heard. When someone comes over to your house, they see success. They see how things are done correctly. They see something that they aspire to one day. On the outside. What is that monogram I see on the hostess' apron? P.O.W.? We know who THAT is! The Princess of Wow! That's right. You met her at church in chapter 1 and now here she is greeting you at home.

Interestingly, not a single biblical account of hospitality that I could find described the quality of food served to eat or state of cleanliness of any house into which Jesus and his disciples, Paul and Barnabas, or any of the others who were shown hospitality for the sake of the gospel. No tableware is mentioned. No kids' behavior is mentioned. Many times, not even the hosts and hostesses are mentioned. The only passage that came close to any of these details is the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38–42. We know that Martha was rushing around, stressing out about preparing the meal for Jesus and his disciples, and she was scolded for seeing dinner prep as more important than discipleship. Not exactly a score for showcase hospitality.

The Show Inside

But unfortunately, showcase isn't just about the outside. Showcase starts on the inside. Your mouth might be inviting people into your home, but your heart is looking to showcase to create a barrier of safety that keeps things from getting too real. The desire to score high in someone's eyes overtakes the risk of showing someone the real you and your real kids, in your real house, in your real life.… And how you really need the gospel to be a faithful follower of Christ every day. Perfect feels like a very safe position when people's opinions, and where they might be voiced elsewhere, are scarily big to you.

Hopefully, this version of showcase hospitality is not one you have seen much or put on much. I wish I could say that I've never done it nor think about it. But I certainly have, and I still certainly do. When I welcome people into my home, especially for the first time, I can still detect all too strong whiffs of showcase hospitality oozing out of my sinful heart, desiring to do a double check around my house and repeat the "we're having company over" pep talk to the kids. Or, if something or someone is not ship-shape, there's temptation to explain why it is messy or why they are fussy is almost impossible for me to

not give into. I want my visitors to think well of me in a very worldly-shaped view of good housekeeping. My smile says "come into my humble abode" when I don't want them to look around and think anything about my abode is humble. Ugh!

Repent on Repeat

I wish that repenting of showcase hospitality was a "once and done" kind of sin. I recognize it, I confess it, I'm cleansed of it, and I live free of it, happily ever after. But it is not. And because it is not, I have only two choices concerning hospitality. I could choose not to do it and avoid the temptation. Or, I can choose to go ahead and be hospitable, despite the temptation. Avoiding the temptation seems easier and cleaner, but oh, what good fruit would never see the light of day if I did that!

Some of the most deeply nurturing and strategic ways we support our husbands as ministry partners happen when we welcome others into our home. No wonder showing hospitality to others is a requirement for those being considered for the pastoral ministry. Our lives at home are like a megaphone that broadcasts the gospel our husbands preach from the pulpit.

And when I say gospel, I mean full gospel. Holy God. Sinful people. Sufficient Savior. Repentant lives, empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is a place where others can see the reality of all four aspects of the gospel in living color. You may have talked with others about living a gospel-centered life at home. You may have asked them to pray for you for more grace to do this better.

But when you practice hospitality, you encourage others to watch you and even be wrapped into your lives as you struggle and strive to live it out. You provide them with an example of what gospel living looks like, and what it does not. You allow church members to see that, by God's grace, you are not living in duplicity --you actually live out (and need to feed yourself on) what has been preached. You are imperfect. You are sinners. But you are saved and you are helped by your Savior to love both him and others as he desires.

In 2 Corinthians 2:15, Paul says of Christians: "for we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." Sometimes I think we act like that aroma is something intrinsic to us. As if somebody smells us and they will smell Christ's perfection as if we've arrived at that. The reason why we need the aroma of Christ infused into us is because we have the stench of sin upon us. It is only by His grace we were cleansed of sins smell of death once and for all by Christ.

And yet still, our sin stinks as we live in the now and not yet of sanctification until face-to-face, we are completely transformed. It helps others to see our daily stink of sin in our daily return to be bathed in Christ to find what we need to live as he calls us to live. This is the aroma of Christ, too. It is so encouraging for others to see and hospitality in our home is a wonderful place in which to see it in our lives. The power of the gospel is sinners saved. But who can see that power if we do not show ourselves to be sinners in need of salvation? This takes great humility and invulnerability, but it can exponentially multiply the impact of everything your husband preaches.

Showing Honor Rather than Showing Off

Now, about that perfectly clean house, quiet, well-behaved cherub-like children and homemade cuisine. I'm not saying they are not nice to have. And I'm not saying that for some guests, or for certain occasions, they are especially appropriate or actually add to the appreciation you show towards them and your hospitality. For example, perhaps you're having someone over for dinner and it's your birthday. You might decide to point out what their favorite meal is or bake them a special cake.

Perhaps you having a Missionary couple home on furlough over and you hope they can share about their lives in an un-interrupted manner, you might want to think strategically about how not to make your dinnertime yet another battle in the war of your willful toddler learning not to throw their food, as most nights are in this season with this child.

And, I'm not saying you're supposed to not put it in any effort to clean your house or train your children in good manners or put time in your dinner prep. What I am saying is look to your heart. And, look to the opportunity. If your heart struggles with showcasing, monitor how much of your cleaning up really has to do with honoring your guest, and how much has to do with your guest honoring you. And if an opportunity for hospitality arises and you know it would be a good fruit, but you know you don't have time to clean or prep like you would like to, don't turn it down because of this.

I have been amazed at how blessed visitors have been by the dog hair fluffs on my floor or the piles of laundry yet to be folded on my kitchen table when they came over to talk. I can hardly stop praising God for the blessing dirty dishes in my sink have been! Imperfect has a funny way of opening hearts. Perhaps that's because perfect rarely is anything but a still shot caught at a very rare moment in any of our lives, and even then, someone has probably had to doctor up the picture to get it to look as good as it does.

Imperfect. In process. Incomplete. Welcomes others in. And when you do, watch your opportunities multiply to speak about the things that really matter, rather than just a "Hey, howdy, have a good day," as you pass each other in the church hallway on Sunday.

101 Ways to Cook Chicken (Hospitality' Many Hats)

The stereotypical recipe for hospitality in my mind is our family plus guests plus a meal with conversation equals hospitality. No doubt, this is one of the most well-worn hospitality recipes used by our family. I can imagine how many people we have had the privilege of feeding around our table and the joy of building each other up with good gospel conversations.

But over the years, I found that this classic "recipe" is only one of many ways to show hospitality and enjoy a feast of fellowship, without necessarily any food involved. how did these other versions of hospitality come to be part of our lives? They were created as our goal of hospitality stayed the same, but our family, our schedule, our budget, our season of life, and our opportunities changed.

Let's take a look at some of these versions of hospitality and how they have been helpful. These can help even the busiest schedule find a spot for hospitality.

1. Hands-on Titus 2 iness

Titus 2 and Proverbs 31 are perhaps the two most frequently chapters taught on as biblical summaries of how godly women should live. I have seen these passages discourage women perhaps as much as I seen them encourage women. They see their lack of some of these attributes as a failing report card of their life. Perhaps we need to do a better job of emphasizing God's grace to strengthen us and bless our feeble attempts to live out any of these. And, to emphasize the Proverbs 31 bookends (seeking to do her husband good, v. 12 , and fearing the Lord, v. 30) more than all the specific activities listed as the point of these verses and the pointer to how to God wants them to live their lives.

But I find one of the best partners for any study from Titus 2 or Proverbs 31 is inviting others into my home for a realistic look at what living them out means and doesn't mean. It helps them to see all the failure and weakness. It helps them to see us asking God for strength to steward well all that he is giving you and him to grow your heart to better love him, your husband and your children.

It helps them see you stumble and watch you ask your husbands and kids for forgiveness, when we don't live as we should. There's no better time to talk with someone about how to not yell at your kids when you're frustrated, than right after you slipped into it yourself. There's no better partner for your words than your life. When someone sees you strive for the same thing you teach, yet not perfectly and not without a fight. There's an encouragement that comes with such a humble, honest pursuit of God by you, a sinner fully saved, yes. But being sanctified by God, only little by little. Sink or swim, you are headed to Jesus!

2. I help you as you help me

Many times, we imagine one-on-one discipleship being a sit down at the table with Bibles open study event. We certainly need our Bibles open and to seriously study the truth of God's Word and think about how to apply them to our lives.

But what if your schedule only allows 20 minutes in the middle of the day for such dedicated attention with another woman, and that on a good day?! What if you've got mountains of laundry the size of Mount Everest happened to be covering that table and will be eating dinner on a mountaintop of underwear if you don't get it folded and put away? Does that mean you cancel discipleship time because it doesn't fit the model? No, it does not! Discipleship can look a lot like a la Deuteronomy 6:12: "you shall teach them [God's laws] diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."

Yes, this verse was written to parents teaching your children. But are not those we disciple our spiritual children? I think the Lord had Moses tell parents to capitalize on all the time when their hands are busy but their mounts are free because life takes so much time and there is so much truth to teach. Not only is this multitasking great benefit to the children, spiritual or biological, but it's great for the parent/discipler to spend their open thought time dwelling on the Lord. And on top of that, you are modeling that Titus 2/Proverbs 31 way of life... And at the same time, that extra set of hands turned your mountain peak into a molehill and half the time it would've taken if you did it by yourself. They help you while you help them.

3. Halfway house hospitality

Sometimes, there's a man who desperately needs to talk to our husband, or a wife who desperately needs to talk to me, but it's during family time and the kids (either theirs or ours or both) are running wild. Mark and I have learned to figure out whether it's the husband or the wife who most needs some quiet, private conversation with us without the kids around, and the other takes charge of the kids. While this means half the house is being shown one version of hospitality, such as our husbands loving and leading our kids, the other half of the house is pointing into the couple with another kind of hospitality. Sometimes we invite a couple over knowing ahead of time that we are going to divide and conquer. Sometimes it only becomes apparent after they've come over. The quiet word on the side with each other helps make it clear when this halfway house approach to hospitality would be helpful.

4. Boys night in/girls night out or the reverse

Not everything has to be intense in order to be helpful. There's much good done even by inviting small groups of men over for dinner (especially young, single men, in our case) for time around the table, a little rough housing with your kids, then hanging out with your husband and maybe playing a game of Settlers of Cataan or two-on-two basketball. Or, inviting small groups of women over for dinner (especially young, single women, in our case) for time around the table, a little playtime with their kids, and hanging out with me maybe watching a movie or playing music. Perhaps deep, spiritual conversations will arise, and perhaps they won't. Perhaps you will all just enjoy fellowship of being together and laughing a lot.

I've been amazed at how many people who we've invited over this way have later shared how foundational those times were to their view of family and marriage. We didn't do anything particularly intentional. We just wrapped them in. I think sometimes we underestimate how powerfully the landscape of the gospel in our homes, in our ordinary life can speak to others, especially those who did not grow up in Christian homes, themselves.

5. While the cats away, the mice will play or maybe pray

My husband and I have found using the times when the other has a meeting away from home at night as a great time to fill with inviting men (in his case) and women (in my case) over to spend time. We also do this on nights when my husband is working on his sermons or grading intern papers. Even though most of that time is spent with him quietly working, other guys love to come to work on their Sunday school class notes or seminary online class work, or Sunday evening service devotionals, or just to sit in there and read.

My husband's study takes up most of the second floor of the large Capitol Hill rowhouse the church has kindly given us as the parsonage. So I can tell you, that while a lot of good work gets done quietly, I can hear the faint sound of conversation and laughter, too. Many a man has profited from their time in that study. Many gospel conversations have arisen; many friendships forged in that study. It has been a hub of hospitality, evangelism, and discipleship for over three decades.

This has also been a great time to invite a few women friends over during that time, as well. This was especially useful when the kids were still at home, giving us opportunity for (fairly) uninterrupted fellowship.

6. Home away from home

For many of our years before kids and after kids, and a number of our years while the kids were at home, we welcomed singles and sometimes couples to live with us, sometimes for weeks, but not unusually even for months or years. Usually this was because of some special financial need or some other personal need on their part.

Since these people were to become such an integral part of our lives for a long period of time, we thought carefully before we invited them to live with us. Particularly, we had to think through how to continue to foster good marriage and family time even with them living with us. In the time when our kids were at home, we would bring them into the conversation. Sometimes, it would be us discussing with them what effect hosting this person might have on their lives. But more often, it would be discussing with them how they felt about adding a person or a couple to our household.

We learned the hard way how important it was to discuss ground rules with any potential long-term live-in guests. And, to express upfront that if the situation turned out not to be a good fit from either side, to not be offended. We love these visitors and desire to care for them, but our primary responsibility was Mark's and my relationship and our relationship with the kids. If they were willing to come and stay with us on those grounds, we were happy to have them.

Hospitality of this nature is a lot riskier, but the fruit can be a lot deeper, too. I admit, with almost every person/couple who stayed with us long term, there's had to be some sort of "heavy, deep, and real, conversation as our lives rubbed up against each other. As hard as those conversations were at times, they deepened our relationship with these dear friends. And the blessings only began there. Some of our kids' favorite memories are related to these friends becoming family. Some of my favorite memories are, too! And God kindly blessed his gospel witness as these people observed day by day our relationship as

husband and wife and with our kids. And not always because we were doing everything right and they wanted to duplicate everything we chose to do in our family life. Sometimes, it was because they learned lessons about what NOT to do that God graciously helped us be humble enough to allow them to see. Ah, imperfectful people! All around us, and in us!

"With every guest, there is a blessing" became my unspoken motto as God always blessed us or the guests in ways, both expected and unexpected. through this adoption-like hospitality.

7. Same old, same old hospitality

In the pre-kid years and now in the empty-nester years, the who's and when's and what's of hospitality are easy. We simply decide together who to invite over to our house. They can be as quirky and complicated, or serious and straight-forward, stranger or old friend.. It didn't matter.

But in the years when we had kids, this no longer worked. Our kids needed to be a part of welcoming others into our home, even if just for dinner, especially if it was for a weekend or longer stay. When our kids were young, they didn't mind that we had lots of different people over for meals.

But especially when they entered junior high and senior high, they mainly wanted to us to host they were comfortable with at dinner time. I guess we could've just told our kids they needed to be happy with our choices and force them to cooperate against their comfort level. Sometimes we did; but, only when we talked to them about it. Mostly, we realized that our kids were the top-priority "strangers" we hosted and discipled in our home for 18 or so years of their lives. Here, we would share with them and live out before them the gospel and the good, loving ways of the one, true God. They would be gone before we knew it. They would remain our top hospitality priority while they were at home.

And because of that, we used their teenage years as an opportunity to see more of the same people they were comfortable with to share our dinner table. Not only did this show our kids the high priority they were in our hearts, but it allowed them to build friendships with these other Christians, too. Some of these friends didn't just share meals with us, but they wound up going on vacation with us and even doing things with our kids without us. And not only did they bless us by their more frequent, deeper friendship, but once more, they were blessed by watching us even more closely as we tried to love each other and love our kids. Many of those friendships with our kids that have lasted even up to today, decades later!

8. Hospitality delivery

Sometimes you are snowed under, but someone still longs to meet up with you at home. The thought of finding something to feed your family let alone an extra or to sounds impossible. You're just hoping there's enough eggs in that lone egg carton to fill everyone's belly! This is a great time to suggest hospitality delivery: having the people who want to meet up with you bring the meal and even clean up afterwards. Sounds a little audacious, doesn't it?

But the beautiful thing about asking somebody else to bring the dinner is you show them your limits. Limits can be one of the very best things we show others in this showcase world of ours. Sometimes we get so caught up with the blessing of caring for others that we forget it can be an even bigger blessing when we let others care for us.

9. Late-night liaison

In my mind, classic hospitality is inviting someone over for Sunday lunch or some evening for dinner. But if mealtimes are your most important family time, you might feel like it's better to reserve them just

for your family. Or, you're happy to include others to join you for mealtimes, but the kids need so much attention or cheerfully involve themselves in the majority of the conversation (after all, it is family time), you might do better to add in time to talk more on interrupted Lee after the kids go to bed; or, simply invite your guests to come over later in the evening, with or without dessert and coffee, for more focused time. Either way, not only does this give you good time for deeper conversations, but it teaches those who come over the priority you set on time with your kids.

We do this frequently even now, though the kids have all left home, when a single man wants to meet with Mark. It protects our couple time together earlier in the evening. Often I go to bed much earlier than my husband. He feels freer to schedule meetings with a single man later at night after I've gone to bed. He will invite him to come over to our house (his study in our case since it in our house) and talk then. I could do the same thing, though usually I don't because I'm the one going to bed earlier.

10. First steps towards friendship

Finding good friends that you can open up to deeply can be quite a process, especially when you're new to the church. Inviting singles and couples over to your house can be a great way to get a better sense of them as friends. It's sort of like dating in groups before you enter a one-on-one courting relationship. You can find out a lot in the context that provides you with closer interaction but with less expectation.

Many of the best friends that I have made in the churches in which Mark has been pastor have started out by having couples over for dinner. And even if it turns out neither the husband or wife winds up being someone you think might become a very close Confident, you didn't lose anything! You still got to know someone better in order to encourage them, and they got to know you better to encourage you, too.

11. Reverse hospitality

There is something very special about you hosting hospitably. It gives people an opportunity to learn more about you as they see you in your home environment. But the same is true in reverse. When you and your husband except an invitation to go to someone's house, it gives you an opportunity to understand them better in their own home environment. There is a whole different set of conversations that can be started as you learn about them. But if it's possible, get a babysitter if you have kids, unless you know their house, and the potential conversations you"ll have, to be very kid-friendly. It will allow you to focus on your hosts instead of whether your child is about to pull their cat's tail or lay their hands on fragile vase.

12. Same house, separate door

As I mentioned above, my husband's study takes up most of the second floor of our four-story Capitol Hill parsonage. And when I say study, I don't mean a small room like space that has room for a few bookcases and a desk. I mean a space as big as some people's whole dining room and living room combined. Not only is my husband's desk the size of a dining room table (it actually IS a dining room table!), but there's a whole separate section that has a couch and more chairs as well. The walls are lined all around with bookcases.

But this study is more than a man-cave for Mark. Our house sits across from the back door of the church, and his study serves as a regular workspace for the many, large meetings he holds during regular work hours, some evenings, most weeks. There is almost no place in the house where others cannot hear me and I cannot hear them. I don't mean I can hear every word of their conversation, but I can hear enough to know that they are there.

On the other hand, they can hear if the kids and I are playing or fighting; if I'm crying up a floor in our bedroom, or practicing steel drums or hammered dulcimer down a floor in main living area. Really, the unfinished basement is the only area that is soundproof from my husband's study on the second floor. But even then, my husband's overflow books are down there and sometimes men are working there.

In some ways, this is the most invasive, pervasive hospitality we practice. Our back door is almost always open and most people who frequent my husband's study feel no need to knock. Many have their own key to our house. The second-floor bathroom gets pummeled as much as any commercial bathroom over at the church. When you think of DC, perhaps you think of locking your doors to protect yourselves from thieves or other kinds of bad guys. When I think of DC, I'm thinking of "When do we need to lock our doors to protect our personal time and make sure no one comes into our home unannounced?" We are talking about major hospitality here.

I have LOVED my life in their crazy house with this super-sized study and revolving door of men. I wouldn't want it any other way. But that's not to say there's no downside or difficult days. It is easy for me to feel overwhelmed by the constant traffic. Sometimes, I feel like I have no place to call my own. This has especially been true in these last decades as I've gone through cancer, and now an autoimmune neurological condition that sends me into paralysis and has made my bedroom the dining room, right underneath part of Mark's study. Sometimes, I just need a place to weep without feeling that everyone is listening. But on the other hand, if I need some instant help, there's almost always someone there to supply it.

I'll just say this right now: my husband loves his study! He loves to have his books around him. He loves to have his crazy, eclectic music blaring out. He loves having a place to have lots of guys in to study, to grow, and to talk. But, it can also be super tempting for Mark to pull a "Mr. Bennett" from Pride and Prejudice, who escaped to the study (and away from the family) every night. As someone who is regularly holding discussions and grading papers for the class of 6 – 9 interns twice a year, and who has many speaking engagements outside our church, Mark has a lot to do.

Mr. Bennett went to his study to escape from his family, but Mark is usually going there to work --work that we've together decided is good for him to do. So, is the study really the problem, when I get upset that he's not around as much as I would like? Or is it our management of his schedule and some sort of change that we need to make and how much work he does? Hmmm….

There is something that makes a huge difference in Mark being able to have his study in our home: a separate staircase that goes directly up to the study from our back door. This allows the dozens of people who go back and forth from my husband's study without coming through our personal home space. The only place where there is a crossover into personal home is when they go from his study to the bathroom. But even then, they're only using the hallway.

Think carefully before your husband puts his study/working office in your home. Is this the kind of hospitality you and your husband want to take on? As you can see, there are pros and cons. In our case, I would rather have Mark have a study at home, especially if he's going to be doing work after regular office hours. Far better to have him nearby, either because I or the kids might need him. And, well there's never been even a hint of temptation like this in his life, I think it's better for us to be aware of who is meeting with him and/or what he's doing in his study during those after-hours. And, having made the choice to have a study at home, we become aware of the pitfalls and over the years have gotten much better at communicating when changes need to be made.

Come up with your personal list of costs and benefits. So much in this decision depends on the specifics of your church, what your husband's workload is like, what would be best for your family, how many people would be regularly visiting your husband and when, and how disruptive it would be for him to have his study in your house. Talk through these pros and cons and come to an initial plan.

Some people, like us, have the luxury of choosing one or the other. Others may not. Church plants or churches in closed countries often have no building of their own. These pastors have to work from their homes, whether they like it or not. While you may not have the luxury of a separate office space outside the home, like we have, you still can talk through how to both make the most of the hospitality opportunities and make the best atmosphere for your husband to get good work done, while also caring the best you can for your family.

13. Fountain of youth (group)
Most of the hospitality we've been talking about thus far has been centered around adults. But there is something very special about opening your home to the youth of your church. Teenagers are full of so many questions. The world bombards them with so many reasons to think the sacrifices, let alone the truths of Christianity, are worthless.

If these teenagers grew up in a Christian home, hopefully they have seen their parents live out to the best of their ability their faith. But how much of what they are seeing is just something their parents do, and how much is what Christians do? And what do they do with some of those awkward, burning questions that they want to talk to some adult about, but rather it not be their parents?

Time in your home can be invaluable to these young men and women! Teens are so relational. If they get a chance to know you and for you to know them, their names and ask about their lives, the more reason they want to pay attention to what your husband says as he preaches.

For teens who attend your youth group, but do not come from a Christian home, your home provides insight into life they have never known. Watching your life at home can be such a powerful megaphone for the gospel. It's especially helpful for you as the wife to be on hand for intimate conversations with the teenage girls. It is not you, perhaps some of the youth group volunteers or leaders who are women.

It may seem unthinkable that inappropriate things can happen between teenage girls and pastors or male youth group leaders, but it does happen. And even if that were not the case, there are so many conversations that these girls can have with you about things it would be awkward if not inappropriate to with the men.

Our first three years out of college was spent up at Gordon Conwell theological seminary as Mark was pursuing an M.Div. He filled his required on-the-job ministry experience by volunteering to assist with the youth group of a local church that was quite liberal, but which had hired a conservative, evangelical youth pastor. We were young and full of energy and dove in headfirst with these high school students. Wednesday nights quickly became Bible study and homemade chocolate chip cookie night at the Devers' house.

The inductive Bible studies opened their eyes to the truths of Scripture in new ways. But how amazing was the fruit that came from the conversations over the chocolate chip cookies after Bible study! Kids came to know the Lord. He changed the course of their lives. We still have contact with a number of these youth group kids, now in their 60's like us, and by God's grace, they are faithfully loving the Lord.

14. Small group setting

In the New Testament, we see the church gathering together for fellowship, worship, and prayer in homes. While church buildings may have replaced the need for many churches to meet in homes out of necessity, most still use members' homes for Bible study and small group meetings. Meeting in a home can make a huge difference in fostering honesty and open communication, especially for those new to the group. Often, your home provides more than a backdrop for gospel conversation, but is actually a display of it as small group members observe your interaction as husband and wife in your interactions with your kids, as well as how you will come others into your home with its less than perfections.

These are just fourteen of many possibilities for hospitality. I'm sure you will come up with many more in your own experiences. The important thing is whether your hospitality opportunities look like ours. The important thing is whether they showcase the gospel, not showcase a façade of perfection.

A Few More Tips and Cautions on Hospitality

Cooking prep

Cooking in batches and freezing meals ahead of time can go a long way in keeping meal prep from being what prevents you from having someone over for dinner. There are lots of great books as well as websites that can suggest easy make ahead and freeze meals. Cooking in batches has been one of the best things I have done in making hospitality low stress.

They aren't coming for the food

Even if you don't make ahead, don't let your hospitality be hindered by meal prep. Everybody enjoys a homemade dinner, but the truth is, most guests would rather spend time with you eating deli meat slapped on to bread with a slide of chips and pickles than not get to spend time with you at all. You might have to let your pride down a few notches, but then again, we talked about how that is usually nothing but helpful for authentic hospitality.

Halving or doubling your husband's ministry

Hospitality is wrapping people into your family life, but it shouldn't overwhelm your family life. Think carefully about what your family needs. Add hospitality only where you are still able to care well for your family. Am I saying you never have anybody over if it's not a good time for your family? No, I am not. There may be times when someone else's needs trumps even the regular needs of your family. But that trumping should not be a regular occurrence. If it gets to be, then you need to regroup and reconsider how much hospitality you are extending.

Mile wide, inch deep

One of the biggest considerations is your kids. Like I mentioned earlier, you only have two decades with your kids at home. Make sure your home feels like their home, and that your heart is for them even over the members of your church. This is especially important if your church holds a lot of meetings in your home, or, if like my husband, his working office is in our home and lots of young men come over to hang out in this study, after hours. You may need to withhold other forms of hospitality to make sure the kids have enough time alone with you to as parents.

If our history is anything to learn from, don't wait until you're old enough to communicate the feeling of neglect. If anything, err on the holding back. And if members of the church complain that they don't see you enough, hopefully explain what you're trying to do. This may not be a fun conversation, but it may be helpful to those members to see your husband leading your family well. Once more, you were showing yourself to be finite and trying to be a good steward of those who God has entrusted to you in

a way he has entrusted them to none other. This also may be a time to meet a couple at a restaurant for dinner on a date night rather than bring them home to be a part of your family time. It means your kids don't have to acclimate to get more people in your house, but gives you the opportunity to fellowship with them, nonetheless.

What to do with drop ins

Drop ins are tricky. They're especially tricky at my house because our back door, the door most people use to enter our house, faces the church parking lot and is usually unlocked. So instead of having the choice of whether to answer the door not, if for some reason it's not a good time. Often, people just come into my kitchen, and sometimes, they have even come all the way up the top floor of our four-story house, in our bedroom area (!) to see if I'm available for visit! Not much time or privacy to come up with a game plan!

Your case is probably not like mine. Your house might not be next to the church parking lot and even if it is, your back door might be locked because your husband looks over at the church not in your house. Or, your church members might not be prone to impromptu visits like a number of our church members are. So, the first thing you need to do is assess whether last-minute drop ins are an issue in your situation; and if so, what makes them an issue.

Is it that you are a homeschooling mom, and visitors like to come during key classroom time, disrupting learning and perhaps frustrating the visitors?

Is it that, like me, you struggle almost daily with illness, and it really helps for you to have a heads up before somebody comes to your door? Are you an introvert with traffic stream of visitors that might make even the boldest extrovert want to go hide in the closet?

Or is the issue so much timing, but more of the desire to make sure your home looks like a showcase? Logistics. Heart issues. These are just four of the different types of things it helps to think about as you come to a good plan for spur of the moment visitors.

In some ways, logistics are one of the easiest issues to deal with. Some of my homeschooling mom pastor wives' buddies have made signs that they stick on their doors saying something like "No visitors right now, thank you. School in session."

I have learned that I can lock the door to our kitchen, even when we must leave our back door open for meetings in Mark's study. We've had a number of awkward "wrong turns" into our private living area, especially now that my physical condition makes the dining room my bedroom. I've learned to be honest with people dropping by for a visit and I'm not feeling well. I am more of an introvert, and our house does have such a traffic stream of visitors that sometimes makes me want to hide in a closet! I've learned that it's okay not to be available at the drop of a hat, if I am frazzled.

But I've also learned could take an honest look at my heart when really everything is an embarrassing mess, and I just don't want the visitor at the door to see it. It's at times like those that I have to remind myself that God may have brought that woman to my door because the very thing she needs to see is the "state of emergency" of me and my house. Welcoming her to come talk to me while I let it go, or even let her help me as we talk, may do her such good. Other times, physically I feel terrible or I'm exhausted from so many visitors, but God wants me to be available to someone else. He uses these times to rely more fully on His sufficiency in light of my weakness. It's not easy to balance all of these factors. Give yourself enough grace to set up healthy boundaries. But ask for wisdom AND grace for those times when what is needed falls outside of the boundaries.

But the bottom line is, in a vibrant church you may have for more people who want to meet with you and it times that are awkward for you then you can ever meet with and still be a good steward of those most important things that God is giving you to do, like caring well for your family. You can expect to disappoint people even when you're doing the right thing. And while that's part of the time, showing them that you were finite and you are thinking in terms of being the best steward you can be might also be the very thing God sent that visitor to your door to learn because they need to learn that, too. In all cases, be gracious to those you turn away from your door. Even if it's not a good time to meet with them, you can send them away with a smile on your face and empathy in your heart.

Do I have to be hospitable to everyone?
I think you certainly want to try to be hospitable to everyone in your church, but sometimes after a pattern of gossip or judgmentalness becomes clear and you and your husband may decide that having these people over is actually not helpful. Your husband is the shepherd of his church, but he's also the shepherd of his family. He can decide to keep shepherd difficult sheep at church but shut the "barn door" to your house, if that's what's best.

Bed-and-breakfast or serve yourself?
Everyone loves to be pampered and served. How relaxing is it to be asked over someone's house to enjoy the dinner they cooked, on the place settings they set, enjoying nice conversation followed by leaving the dirty dishes in their sink as you head home. Sometimes hospitality looks like that.

Mark and I decided that if we include people in the cooking preparation, setting the table, and doing the dishes… And if they spend the night letting them change the sheets in the towels… We are able to have more people over for dinner because it takes less of a monumental effort from us. Francis and Edith Schaefer, who basically made their home a retreat center, practiced this more informal kind of hospitality. Not only was this what made their volume of hospitality possible, but it was part of what helped those who stayed with them feel like family. So, when you're considering how much hospitality you want to have, consider where you are on the spectrum of formal to informal hospitality. It may be that you are able to do more with very little additional cost, and with a lot of hidden benefits.

From Section 7: God Is Faithful to Furnish Wisdom

"I praise the Lord, who counsels me, even at night my heart instructs me." –Psalm 16:7, NIV

Some Counsel on Giving and Receiving Counsel

We are constantly in need of counsel. Everyone. It's all over life. In our life in this world, from birth to death, from babies to the grave. There's always something we don't know. There's always something we need to learn and there is no continuing Ed course you can take to cram it all in the weekend. It is a constant, gradual thing. We need to learn more as we go.

What is true for this world, is true with our lives in God. We are constantly in need of more of his counsel. He has redeemed us. He has put us and keeps us on the path of life. He makes it known to us. But it's not very often like the drive along Interstate-10 the goes with Florida all across at least the Texas where you can see miles and miles and miles ahead of you all the way to the horizon and your destination at the end. If the alignment in your car is good, you could almost fall asleep at the wheel and be just fine.

But most of the time, there are bends in the road and bends in your life and you can see little but what's right in front of you and you better tuck into some Red Bull if you start to doze off. When I'm on the road, I usually use an app like Waze. It's sort of travellers, road map and GPS all in one. I get reports from other travelers, telling me what's ahead. I get step by step directions for how to get to my destination, and through GPS, I'm constantly in communication with updates and trip statue and help.

But if only there was a Waze to give us directions for life, let alone ministry life! Well, there is. And David, living thousands of years before apps and phones and satellites, is telling us about it right here in this psalm: "I praise the Lord, who counsels me, even at night my heart instructs me; I will keep my eyes always on the Lord." Yes, God counsels us. He instructs us. He makes known the path of life. He can do that because he made the road. He put the lines on the middle-of-the-road and the lines on the side of the road and he gives us eyes to see that there is a path that he is directing us along.

But notice those verbs. There are "s"es on the end of them. They feel not very "one and done" but continual, progressive. That we are made to be daily, regularly dependent upon his instruction. This means surely we can depend upon him to give us the counsel, the wisdom we need to walk that path of life that he has set out for us, but in the way He chooses to get it to us.

And God has His Waze equivalents to counsel us. They are the same, three spiritual food groups we thought about in our meditations on Psalm 16:2.

They are:
- Fellowship with God by His Spirit, our GPS
- The Word of God, our step-by-step directions
- And God's people, our fellow travellers

Three food groups, but one God at work in them all

There may be some promises in God's word I have a hard time holding onto, but one I have so much confidence in like taking a check to the bank and getting a cash, is James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." I have seen God answer this prayer in the most remarkable ways.

Sometimes, He gives wisdom through just one of the three food groups, such as when I'm praying. But most of the time, God counsels me through all three working together: time with the Lord, time in His Word, and time with God's people, all bouncing off of each other. It would seem that God seems to love to use His people to give counsel to each other. And, that we should expect God's people to be a very important part how God makes known his path of life to us. And, for us to be an important part of how God makes known His path to them. And perhaps most surprising of all, that God would choose to use NOT just our counsel to help each other, but to also use the very process of us counselling each other to grow us and make us more like his Son. These are all very good reasons to make sure you have friends who know you and your husband and can counsel you.

Back in our meditations on Psalm 16:2, I went into a lot of depth about how God uses all three of these to help us seek Him and grow in godliness. I'm not going to rehash that here, but feel free to go back and listen if you want to know more.

In this section, I'd like to share with you some of the things Mark and I have learned over the years. First, I'd like to give you some of my best counsel on giving and receiving counsel. Then, I'd like to share with you a walk through seasons in our forty years in ministry and share some of the most important things we've learned.

So, first of all, here goes. My counsel on counsel.

1. Ears to Hear, Heart to Change

But the funny thing about counsel is that it's not just enough to have good advice. Just look at Proverbs! It's filled with all sorts of examples of counsel and two kinds of people. The fool and the wise man. Circumstance after circumstance about what they do with that wisdom that is presented to them. And here are some adjectives that describe that wise man. And, that will help you immensely as you seek to receive counsel from the Lord, especially through God's people. Be teachable. Be humble. Be needy. Realize you are always a learner. Expect to be receiving counsel for somebody else. Be gracious in the counsel that you receive. Don't be surprised that others are stupid at something or other that there up to. Be encouraging.

2. Confirmation for Callings

Callings often start with the desire and conviction but are borne out in the concrete. You may feel called to do this or that. Your husband may feel called to do this and that this or that. That may be a very true calling. But where the concrete comes into is making sense of the timing. You may be called to do something but that doesn't mean you might be called to do it next month. There may be things that you as a couple or the husband as a pastor, or your family or other circumstances that help provide the timing of that road. So, you might know you're supposed to be going to dinner but there may be a blizzard right now that the people around you can tell you about that they see that you need to be prepared for. And to go now even with the calling, would be foolishness.

It doesn't have to mean you have no confidence in God because you choosing to wait to be better equipped to do this thing in front of you. That's one of the reasons why when a man feels like he's called

into the ministry, here at CHBC, they provide many opportunities for these men to preach and teach. This includes everything from a kids' Sunday School class to a Sunday sermon. The pastoral staff takes time to provide constructive feedback that helps to grow in their gifts and confirm (or not) their calling to the ministry.

Our journey to CHBC started when Mark came on his own up simply to preach one Sunday. The church had lost its pastor months earlier and was frequently in need of someone to fill its pulpit. Mark had already been told by the pastor search committee that he was too young and inexperienced to be considered for the senior pastor job. But they were happy to have him preach once. That preaching changed the committee's mind about Mark. It led to a question and answer session and further conversation that day. They wanted to further consider him for the job.

Mark left DC feeling like God was calling us to DC. But when he came home to me, he didn't say that. He told me he wanted me to go and see what life would be like for us here. It wasn't enough for him just to FEEL called. If this was what God really calling him to Capitol Hill Baptist Church, there would be concrete confirmation that this was a good fit for our family. I didn't have to come away from DC as giddy as a trip to Disneyland. It would be helpful to see the potential difficulties as well as So yes, there was God's Word. There was prayer. There was Mark's sense of calling. But there was practical confirmation, too.

Even just the "calling" to take on more ministry opportunties at church helped by practical confirmation. I remember one man who was a super-star teacher. He gladly took on more and more teaching opportunties at church. However, his wife was exhausted from tending to their family of small children on her own because he was either prepping for teaching more or gone, teaching. It wasn't until someone pointed out that his family was not flourishing from all of his hours away from them nourishing the church, that he could see things needed to change. Once more, the feelings of calling do best when confirmed with the concrete.

Welcome the input of wise counsel around you to confirm callings either you or your husband feel. It may safe you a lot of hardship and heartache. We are all people with blindspots!

3. Gift Inventories and Serving Your Church

Some churches put a lot of emphasis on gift inventories. The idea that God has gifted each of His people with skills and passion to do certain things well. You should figure out what those special gifts are and make those what you do for the church.

There is no doubt that God gifts His people and wants His people to use these gifts for the good of the church and the glory of His name. But sometimes, too much emphasis on gifts and passion keeps people from the humble service in tasks that are desperately needed. Cleaning out the dirty church refrigerators or taking a lonely, older lady out to lunch, but both are of benefit to the church.

I would encourage you to look at what needs to be done rather that your special gifting subset. Many times, God has planned for you to use those special gifts in His service. But perhaps there will be even more times when what your church needs doesn't require those special gifts. And when you are willing to do those, often humble tasks, I've found that God uses not just your service but your humility to encourage the church.

Be mindful of your gifts; use your gifts; but don't let them be the constraint on your service to the church. This is good counsel for you, and it's great counsel to encourage others.

4. Other's Counsel: Take Some, Leave Some

People love to give advice. Sometimes, it's helpful. Sometimes, it's not. Often, it's a mixture of both. Listen with humility to what others have to say, but use your discernment filter as you decide what to do with their counsel. I find "take some, leave some" has been the most helpful approach.

Take some, leave some for ME

There are some real words of wisdom mixed in with some unhelpful advice. I can thank them for that wisdom and humbly act on it. Or, their words to me aren't really on target and they hurt. But I can grow in responding in love and kindness to them.

Take some, leave some for THEM

Their counsel isn't really what I need, but listening to their perspective teaches me something about THEM.

So, every time somebody counsels us, there something for us to learn. It just might not be what they thought they would be teaching, or what we thought we might be learning!

5. Counsel with Encouragement

80% encouragement 20% correction. This was what Mark says is a great balance in friendship and discipleship. Elizabeth Elliott also uses this "80/20 rule," as she calls it, for what to look for in a good husband. Someone who's 100% would be great, but impossible. If you can get someone who's 80% great and 20% not quite what you would like, you've got yourself a great man!

I like to combine both of these thoughts into one, especially with my husband. I know I have at least an 80/20 guy. He tries so hard to do what's best for everyone, but especially me. What a privilege it has been to have him as my husband-leader-friend! I'd give him closer to a 90/10!

I relish Mark's 90, but think carefully about how to help him with the 10. I find there are two categories that fall in his 10: those that we've not brought up before and those that we have.

For those that have not been brought up before, it's time for a humble, winsome, but put-all-cards-on-the-table conversation. These conversations go best when I start out with that 80% encouragement of all I appreciate in him and his leadership. But then, comes the humble, winsome difficulty-sharing part. No fun, but the encouragement helps him and me a lot.

But at this point in our lives, there are very few of those never-been-brought-up-before conversations. Usually, it's a version of an old struggle. I find I don't need to bring up the whole big issue again. That feels like kicking the dog that's down already. I know he's trying and wants to get it all right. Encouragement is even more important in these cases, with my husband, otherwise he gets so discouraged. I encourage him with even the smallest thread of goodness that I can see in what he's doing. I pick it up and make it into a stitch of appreciation.

I've also found it helpful to not be "stingy" with my encouragement, only encouraging him when he's gets a 100% on something he's struggling with. Instead, I try to cheer him on with any good effort I notice. Both of these approaches encourage him that I see his efforts and they help him want to try to improve even more.

6. Your Husband's Counsel

Be slow to disregard your husband's counsel. I am not saying your husband will have it all right. My husband doesn't. But I DO know that God has woven their leadership into our lives. Be his helper as he leads you and your family. He's not meant to lead alone. Pray for him. Encourage and be gracious to him. Accept his leadership and thank him for it. Be easy for him to lead. Appreciate who God has made him to be. Remember: he may make many mistakes of learner in his leadership, but rarely, or more likely never, will malice be behind your husband's counsel to you.

Forgive him when he gets something wrong. Help foster his relationship with good advisor-friends. Don't be a silent partner in his leadership. Most of the time, you will be making decisions jointly, anyway. But even if it's something that he must decide on his own, there are many ways you knowledge of a situation (especially with kids). You help fill out their understanding that will lead to them making better decisions.

7. Friend Counselors for Your Husband

Some issues are easier for your husband to hear from guy friends rather than you. Or, you two discuss an issue together, but his guy friends give him great practical advice on what to do. Make time for your husband to have time with godly friends! They will undoubtedly bless your family's life as well as his.

8. Counseling with Your Life

Counseling usually starts with your mouth, but it usually includes a lot else. True for your husband, this is true for you, too. First Timothy 3 lists qualifications for men who aspire to be pastors. As I've said elsewhere, these qualifications can be categorized as: Nourish the church, Flourish the family, and Furnish godly leadership and example. Mouth may be involved in all three of those, but they are often the backdrop for the display of God's truth (and good counsel) in your life!

9. Humble Counselor

You are always a learner in something. God is the only one who needs has no learning curve. He is the only one who has nothing to learn. Be teachable. Be humble.

10. Counsel from our Weaknesses

We usually think about counseling from our strengths and our victories. But I've found, when I'm humble enough to share our struggles and defeats, God uses them powerfully to counsel others. We are weak, but He is strong! Who isn't encouraged when they hear of stories of God's strength in our time of trouble!

11. Counsel that Cuts Down?

Men can counsel each other by joking and cutting each other down, but women should not do that with their husbands or other men. Men see women's jabs differently than men's jabs. Perhaps it is their love language with each other, but it's not our love language to them. Men hear and learn best by our encouragement or humble, winsome correction. Leave the joking to the boys.

12. Counselling Mindfully

One person's easy is another person's hard. Just because somebody is struggling with someone always something that you can do rather easily when it comes to how God wants us to live, never the playing field is never level. There are so many different factors that go into why something like music for us, something might be hard for someone else. We are told in Scripture to encourage the weak and the downhearted and discouraged. not beat them up more.

13. Helping Our Husbands as They Counsel

The family is one of the best training grounds a man has for being a pastor. God has put us in a position to help them in so many ways! We help them understand what it means to be a godly man, a godly husband, a godly father to kids, as they "test drive" their leadership on us. The experience they gain in our families, will only help them counsel others better. others.

God never wastes anything, even our sin. When we do not react favorably to their leadership, God even uses that to prepare them to respond with patience and love for others in the church who might not welcome their leadership. (May God grant us respect for our husbands that gives them very little practice of this nature!)

We help our husbands know themselves better –their weaknesses and strengths—and can pray for them. We help them in their counseling by counseling women who need long-term help. We help them by improving their counselling skills with certain groups of members, particularly women, simply by what they've learned in living with us.

14. Child Rearing and Conversion Counsel: Avoid the Cake Recipe

It can be so tempting to look at someone else's well-behaved, even converted kids, to think if you copy everything they did that your kids will come out the same way. Kids don't work like the chocolate cake recipe you get from a friend. You know, 2 cups of Bible teaching, plus, 1 hour of prayer, etc and out pop converted, well behaved kids.

Remember: all kids only come out of the womb the same way in one way: they are sinners who need to be saved. Each one will have their own temperament with its weaknesses and strengths. Each have their own story that God is written for them. Each one will need love, discipline, and to be discipled in ways best suited for them.

There is so much we can glean from other families that will help us as we raise our kids. Learn from others! You won't regret it. But don't expect by doing the same things other families do, that it's going to have the very same turnout in your family.

I would tell you to not just learn from the parents with well-behaved kids. Learn from good parents who had/have really difficult kids. They can teach you so much. It is also very helpful

15. Counselling Your Kids with Your Life

The words we use with our kids are displayed on the canvas of our lives. We are their 24/7 reality program. They see in our lives the gospel: do we strive to obey God as our Father and Creator? Do we see our sin and our need for a Savior? Do we see God's goodnesses to us each day and thank Him for them? Do we depend upon God for wisdom and everything else we need?

Hopefully, God will use both your words and your lives to draw your kids to Himself. But be encouraged: even if they do not become believers, even as adults, that God can still be teaching them through your life. Keep living for Him and be amazed at what He can use that to do!

16. Counselling Kids: Under Construction

Even with kids who mean to be Christians, kids are a work-in-progress. Typically, they give their heart when they are little. Then, a bit later like ages 7-10, they develop a greater ability to engage their minds with the truths they are learning. Then, even later, when they are preteens and teenagers, especially,

their will really begins to challenge what they've learned in their hearts and know in their minds know. This is typically when kids begin to really tend to feel the tug of the world, and make a decision to repent and obey, or reject and go their own way, much more like an adult would.

So, don't be surprised that your little child who honestly seems to desire to follow the Lord has problems living it out. I would caution you against accidentally shaming your eager-hearted little one with Bible verses that show their behavior isn't lining up with it. I would be very slow to say, "I don't think you're Christian because you did this, and we know Christians don't do that. You say you're a Christian, so why are you doing that?" as if simply knowing is enough. We know that even in us, as believers, it takes the slow, deliberate work of the Holy Spirit for us to change many times.

Hear me out… I'm not saying that isn't doesn't matter how our kids live. What I am saying is, don't hit them over the head with the Bible to pressure them into a certain character trait. Look at your own life: did/does the fruit of the Spirit magically appear just because you became a Christian? And on the other hand, aren't there non-Christians you know who may even do a better job than you do at certain traits of character?

Scripture is wisdom. Scripture is powerful. But except for justification through Christ (repent and believe and you will be saved), God rarely uses His Word like prescription medicine in the hands of a doctor: "Take two Bible verses now, and it will clear up your problem." Typically, believers grow gradually in their maturity in Christ (sanctification). Two steps forward, one step back is not unusual at all. Keep praying with them and keep pointing them to Jesus and the gospel. Keep encouraging them and teaching them what it means to be a disciple.

We often know what God would have us do before we are able to put it in practice. After all, what does putting it into practice imply, but PRACTICE. "In practice" usually goes on for a really long time. I would even say goes our whole lives. So, don't beat up your kids with Scripture. Point them to the promises of our faithful Savior. Teach them to ask God to help them grow in knowing Him and obeying Him. And pray, pray, pray for them that the seeds planted in them as children would grow into full maturity as a godly believer in time.

17. The Surprising Spectrum of Counselling

Think of counsel as a continuum or spectrum. Usually, when I think of someone giving me counsel, it comes in the form of conversation in the hall or over coffee. Maybe a text or an email. But the truth is, counsel starts far before that conversation ever happens. And it continues long after that conversation ends. Here are different ways we receive and give counsel.

On any particular subject we might need counsel, here are ways God might use to give it to us:

- We regularly seek a growing relationship with the Lord, which does many times, including keeping our hearts tender towards His counsel.
- We pray specifically for wisdom on a specific matter.
- We read (God's Word and other resources) to get wisdom.
- We listen to others speaking to others about similar circumstances.
- We look at others' examples, positive or negative.
- We remember others' examples, positive or negative.
- We foster an open relationship with other so they can observe what we do and be able to counsel well.
- We ask others to share what they do in similar circumstances.
- We carry out the best counsel we have, then learn and reassess.

- We try again.
- We pray again.
- And we do it all, over and over again.

See how it starts way before, and continues long after? There are some people who are still counselling me through things they said or things they did decades ago. Many times, those people do not even know the impact they are still having upon me! Some of the counsel I treasure now are things I disregarded at the time and only later found to be true. Isn't that amazing! Perhaps that will be the case with some of the things you've learned in these sessions.

Some Questions for You

1. While some of the best counsel you received? How did you receive that counsel? Through word through observation, etc.
2. How do you learn from others?
3. How have you walked the line between nagging and giving corrective counsel to your husband?
4. Who has been most helpful in counseling your husband both as he trained to be a pastor and in the ways you just a godly man and husband and father?
5. What is something you are looking for counsel about now?

From Section 8: God Is Faithful to the Finish

"I praise the Lord, who counsels me, even at night my heart instructs me; I will keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him in my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore, my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body will also rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful 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." –Psalm 16:7-11, NIV

Unshaken by Life's Trials

"Keep me safe Lord! Show me the way to go! I can't see anything show me the way to go help me don't know how I'm ever going to do this!" This was my frantic cry to God one night on my way up Wintergreen Mountain. For several years, Mark and I owned a mountaintop house up at the top of this ski resort. The views looking out over the Central Virginia countryside were beautiful, especially in the fall when all the leaves put on all their colorful autumn wardrobe.

I never outgrew the little quiver of excitement as I turned into the resort entrance. On beautiful, curvy roads you rose two thousand feet in about fifteen minutes. The views were spectacular. Occasionally, we'd spot a bear and her cubs in the woods or had to slow down to let a clutch of wild turkeys cross the road. It was tempting to keep looking off at the scenic valley views or into the woods for bears, it better not be for more than a moment. With steep drop-offs on one side and deep rain gulches on the other, you needed to keep your eyes to the road to not wind up in either!

But on the night of my prayer, this usually favorite part of the trip was an absolute nightmare. Weather had moved in and the mountain was covered in clouds. And while this dense fog in the daytime certainly made driving difficult, at night, it made it nearly impossible. I toggled my car lights from high beams to low beams to fog lights, trying to improve my visibility, but that made hardly any difference. I could see nothing beyond the hood of my car. What could I do? How could I safely navigate all those curves? How could I keep some driving off into a ditch or even worse over the side one of the steep sides of the mountain? And on top of the difficult, practical problem with the drive, I was panicking. I was shaking. I cried out to God and He answered my prayers. "Lord, help me calm down. Help me get home," I pleaded. And He heard me.

He gave me words from David, written thousands of years earlier to soak into my soul and calm my fears: "You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. Psalm 139:6-7,11-12, NIV This road was not dark to God. He could help me home. Hadn't I seen Him bring me through other, seemingly impossible situations. He was with me then. I could count on Him to help me now.

He gave me practical help, too. The thought came to me: "You can't see what's in front of you, but you can see what is right below your feet! Open up your door and drive as you look down at the yellow lines. Even if you can only go 1 mile an hour, if you keep your eyes on those lines, you will know where the curves are and won't go off the road."

So, that's what I did and little by little I made my way up mountain's. How grateful I was for those yellow lines! How many times had I groaned my impatience as the Wintergreen road crew made me wait as they blocked a section of that only road in and out of the resort with their regular re-painting of those lines? And now, those little, yellow lines had gone before me and made my trip home possible.

Near the top, I could faintly see blobs of taillights of another car in front of me. How nice it was to have someone else on the road ahead of me, instead of in the dark all by myself! It didn't solve my whole problem, but it did give me a sense of where the road bent ahead of me. This was especially helpful when that car turned right onto the street where our house was located. I was wondering how I was going to find that turn! I was so grateful for the help.

I slowly made my way down this final stretch of curves and hills down to our driveway. With no streetlights, I would have completely missed it, except for the blur of cheerful light that shone out from the house. I let out a sigh as I shut off the car engine! I hoped I would never have to do that again! I was certainly going to warn Mark and the kids to stay away from driving on that mountain on a foggy night!

I stumbled my way up the stairs and through the door of that welcoming, lit-up house. I was still shaking from the experience, but I was not shaken. And now the panic had turned to thrill as the adventure was over and I was safely home. Now I couldn't wait to tell my story to Mark and the others of God's rescue and the incalculable worth of little yellow lines!

David's Beautiful Finale of Faith

Now, I am certain that David never drove a car up Wintergreen Mountain. And as far as we know, David probably never even rode a camel through a sandstorm at night, which perhaps would be the Middle Eastern equivalent to my adventure.

But one thing I do know: David knew many body-shaking, even life-threatening events, far worse than anything I experienced on Wintergreen Mountain or any other day of my life. And yet, even still, David was never shaken.

That is exactly what he is testifying here in the beautiful finale of Psalm 16 in verses 7-11:
"I praise the Lord, who counsels me, even at night my heart instructs me; I will keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him in my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore, my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body will also rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful 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." –Psalm 16:7-11, NIV

David is providing us with an Old Testament version of this beautiful New Testament promise:

> "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." 2 Peter 1:3

No matter what David faced, he found God to be enough for what needed. David fixes his eyes upon God. He is confident that in knowing God and being God's child, that God will give him everything he needs for his current situation and every other situation that waits for him around the bend. Everything he needs, in terms of wisdom. And everything he needs, in terms of perseverance. "With Him at my right hand, I will not be shaken."

Perhaps it is these verses most of all which is why I love this Psalm so much. The confidence that no matter what life brings and no matter how much we are shaking, that God holds us and it all in His

hands. With Him at our right hand—that is, as our helper—we cannot be shaken. Not today. Not tomorrow. Not ever. He will carry us through and all the way home. We are secure.

Let's look at five ways God encourages us, strengthens us, and brings us home to Himself, unshaken.

UNSHAKEN: ASKING GOD FOR HELP

> "LORD, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy… Answer me quickly, LORD; my spirit fails…Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life. Psalm 143:1,7-8, NIV

"What should I do? Where do I find what I need to do it?" That sums up much of what we seek counsel for. We frequently go to others for answers, and that's good. But the best place to start is by asking God.

> "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." –James 1:5, NIV

God promises the wisdom we need to know His will as well as the strength (and other resources) we need to do it… but He loves to be asked. And in our asking, God not only answer us, but He also uses our very asking to grow us and change us. He reminds us of our daily dependence upon Him. He reminds us that He is God and King over this world. He reminds us that He is our Father. He cares! He gives us eyes to see His loving gifts when we ask for them first. And He grows our confidence in Him that He will continue to help us all the way home to heaven.

Why is important for us to remember to pray to God, as pastors' wives? Here are three great reasons:

1. It is a great way to encourage others.
A godly seminary professor made a habit of stopping and praying right away when someone shared a need or concern. It had a great impact upon me, and I have followed his example to this day. It was an encouragement that we belong to the living God and He wants us to go first to Him, our Father, with our needs. And somehow, taking the time to pray right then, rather than the usual "Ok, I'll remember to pray for you" is so much more meaningful to the person sharing their need. And it makes a link between them and me that grows as they come back and share how God has answered our prayers. This is a wonderful and simple way to show love to the members of your church.

2. It gives us hope in impossible situations.
Our emotions are wonderful gifts from God and when they are working in our favor they help fuel our prayers. But, they are nothing to count on! Pray whether you feel like it or not! God doesn't value our prayers by the emotional heat of our heart but by their accordance with His will! Forge ahead even on dull days!

I have come to use times when I don't feel like praying as wonderful times of defiant prayer. What do I mean by that? I don't mean defiant against God, but defiant against my feelings.

Do I feel in despair about a situation? Then I am praising God for His sovereignty over the situation and His complete ability to do whatever needs to be done. I thank Him for His perfect timing in the situation and am asking Him to work powerfully in it, according to His good and perfect will.

Does God feel far away? Then I am praising God for His Holy Spirit that dwells inside of me, comforting me and giving me strength and wisdom, even when I don't feel like it. I am thanking Him that He is near, and I am asking Him to comfort me with His presence.

By these deviant prayers, God helps me to persevere and pray in the hardest, most unlikely times. The peace and joy He has brought me during these prayers have become some of the sweetest experiences in pray I have ever had.

Don't wait to feel your need for God's strength to help you through your day or for God to prepare you for situations that lie ahead. The truth is that you need it, whether you feel like it or not! On the other hand, your problem may not be struggling with feeling your need for God's strength but struggling with feeling that God will provide for your needs in the situations of the day ahead. Perhaps your husband has a night full of committee meetings, and you are faced with caring for all the children alone that evening —including your young teenage girl who is going through a difficult patch of mouthiness and attitude. You've really been struggling with addressing her heart issues and behavior with a firm, loving, patient attitude with her instead of anger. It always seems to be particularly bad when your husband is absent. Will this be another evening of failure? You feel like no one can help you or your daughter. God certainly hasn't seemed to help you overcome your daughter's issues or yours. You wonder what good it does to pray. Don't care how you feel! Keep on praying! God may have not answered your prayers in your timing or your technique, but He is at work! Don't give up!

Unending budget problems. Tensions among staff. False accusations of church members. Writer's block on Saturday night. Squabbles over music style. A few disgruntled prominent members leave the church. Young sheep keep losing their struggle with destructive, besetting sin. Members who feel unloved or uncared for….and on and on. Sometimes the struggles and sin of the saints weigh our husbands down to deep discouragement. Yet it is these very same difficulties that provide opportunities for those beautiful, defiant prayers to God. God uses them to help us keep on praying for God to work out His will in each of these situations and to encourage our husbands to persevere through difficult ministry times.

Choosing to pray defiantly against our feelings and the pessimistic outlook of a situation can be a great way to help others in the church to persevere through trying circumstances in their lives, too. As they see us respond to our situations this way, they are encouraged to do so in their situations. And, when others in your church share their troubles with you, you can show not just compassion and sympathy or offer advice. You can pray defiantly with them about them. Now hear me, I am not saying that you down play the suffering they are going through as you talk with them and pray with them. To the contrary! You are acknowledging how difficult or even impossible their circumstances might be, but how much greater God is and how absolutely able He is to meet their needs in them.

We can ask God to help us pray today to work in our hearts and prepare us by His Spirit for the times that are ahead. We do not know what lies ahead in our husband's ministry that will tempt us to respond in sinful ways. We don't know what ways God will call us to serve. But He does. He can equip us today for what lies ahead. And when trials come, we can know that God has already been at work, preparing us for them.

We can ask God to help us to pray for our husband's ministry. If it is a dry ministry time, we can ask God to help our husbands to keep persevering in prayer for fruit and joy. If it is a bountiful ministry time, we can ask Him to help our husbands to keep on praying, remembering that He is the source of all the good fruit that our husband's ministry is experiencing.

3. It builds unity with our husband and others in the church.

"For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." Matthew 18:20, NIV

Asking God for wisdom isn't just for us alone in our prayer closets. It's for us, with our husband, and us,

with the church. Praying together is an extremely powerful unifier! God's Holy Spirit uses it to change us and knit our hearts together, as well as give us the counsel we need as a church.

If you have ever been to CHBC, you will probably be surprised by how much we pray as a congregation. Prayer of praise, prayer of confession, prayer of Thanksgiving and supplication every Sunday morning. Long prayer meeting every Sunday evening. Elders taking an hour to pray for the congregation at the start of every elders' meeting. That is because our pastors are convinced that God loved to be asked and has woven His good plans for us into our prayers. And those prayers have, indeed, been answered not only with the needed wisdom or strength, but with unity among us as a body.

This all sounds wonderful, but it can be very awkward getting a congregation used to a little dribble of prayer for good but physical things like Sister Bessie's hip replacement surgery, to begin to spend more time in prayer for things for the spiritual health of the church. Pray for your husband to be able to lead the church through the growing pains of longer prayer for the good of the whole church. It will be of great blessing to them and to him as he begins to see an increased unity and hunger for spiritual growth.

UNSHAKEN: SPEAKING GOD'S TRUTH

> "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God." -- Psalm 42:11

I first heard of this concept of preaching to yourself through D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' book, Spiritual Depression. It's a great book and I heartily recommend it. But whether you have heard that precise term or not, you have certainly seen in Scripture. Here it is in Romans:

> "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." –Romans 12:2, ESV

Our minds are renewed through God's Word and in the process, He counsels us and even gives us strength to fight against what the world would counsel us to do. God certainly will use the preaching of His Word on Sundays or through small group Bible studies and even in our conversations with each other, but there is no one on-hand as much as you to preach truth to yourself!

> "Send out your light in your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill into your dwelling! Then I will go to the altar God, to God by exceeding joy, and I will praise you with the Lord, O God, my God. -- Psalm 43:3

Capture Your Emotions

One of the most important reasons to preach truth to yourself as a pastors' wife is to capture your emotions. Our heart is the seat of our emotions and desires. These are good gifts from God that reflect His own passionate heart for the good of His people and His own glory.

But unlike God, our emotions and desires have been affected by sin. This means our hearts still feel very passionate about things, but it can often be the wrong passion about the wrong thing. I can testify that sometimes the passions of my heart are like the San Andreas Fault in California: charged with energy, sometimes stable, but liable to shift when I least expect it, wreaking havoc in my heart and even spilling out onto others. And the problem with passion uncontrolled, is that we either refuse to hear or cannot hear God's wise counsel on the situation, let alone find strength to do what we know God wants us to do.

But God helps us, as we preach truth to ourselves.

"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." Psalm 119:11, NIV

This is great news! We may be unable to bring our hearts to obey God, but God, through His Word, and by the work of His Holy Spirit, can.

#1 Ask God to reveal the sinful passions of your heart that you might know them. Before you read God's Word, ask the Holy Spirit to use it to penetrate the recesses of your heart.

Use God's Word as a prescription to pray for what should be there, but isn't, or what is there but shouldn't be.

- Is your heart cold to God? Prescribe for your heart Scriptures like Psalm 51:12:

"Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

- Is your heart empty of forgiveness in the face of someone's sin against you or your husband? You might prescribe Colossians 3:13:

"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

- Do you feel faithless in light of difficulties you or your husband are currently facing? You might prescribe Psalm 42:5-6, that I mentioned above:

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God."

Like any prescription, you will need to take it repeatedly over many days, for God to use it to transform your heart. God didn't intend His Word to work like an Insta-drug, but that doesn't mean it's not working. His Word never goes out void. It always accomplishes His purposes. Ask God to send His Holy Spirit to work in your heart, replacing the emptiness of your heart with the riches of His truth.

#2 As God reveals areas of out-of-control passion, use God's Word to inscribe your heart with His perfect boundaries.

Sometimes too much passion rather than lack of passion is the problem. This time we are overwhelmed with the fervor of our desires for these wrong things. God's Word tells us that self-control is a gift of the Spirit. This time, find Scripture that speak to desires that are out of control and pray that God's Spirit would bring the gift of self-control to those specific areas.

Are you overwhelmed with anxiety? Dwell on Isaiah 41:10:

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Does anger rage in your heart against someone? Ask God to help you live out Ephesians 4:25-32: "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin." Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold… Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Do you struggle with a critical or gossipy tongue? Ask God tame your tongue with Ephesians 4:29:

> "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up."

Are you overwhelmed with guilt? Remind yourself of what Christ has done with Romans 8:1:

> "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death."

Meditate upon God's Word and ask the Holy Spirit to change your heart and life as only He can do. God is faithful. He can and will help you, in His perfect way and His perfect timing.

As pastors' wives it is especially important that we regularly ask God to search both our own hearts and our husbands' for the building up of sin against each other or against the members in our church. Under-shepherds spend much of their time caring for weak or angry sheep. This is to be expected, but it also can be very, very wearing.

Hearing the countless struggles with sin, painful trials, or sharp criticism of member after member can leave our husbands and us empty of hope and good courage. It is hard for us as their wives to see them weary, discouraged and even wrongly treated. Only God and His Word can give our husbands wisdom to counsel the sheep, wisdom to keep on hoping, and strength to do both, each day and all the way home.

The same is true for the out-of-control passions we may feel in response to ministry demands or members' actions. One of the passions I have found hardest to keep under control as a pastor's wife is one of sinful anger towards members who have wronged or unjustly accused my husband. Sometimes this anger lingers on even after my husband and the person have reconciled. Only by take Scriptures like Ephesians 4:25-27, 31-32 (listed above), and asking God over and over to transform my heart by them have I found relief. Praise God for His powerful Word!

UNSHAKEN: RECALLING GOD'S WORKS

We see David drawing from what he's learned in past experience remembering how God what he's learned about God and his good plans from past experience.

> "I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands."
> -- Psalm 143:5

On Wintergreen Mountain, I remembered how God had helped me before in difficult situations and that that gave me hope that He would and could help me in my current situation. He wasn't instructing me with specific answers this way. He was counseling me by remembering who He always is: If He was faithful before, I can trust Him to be faithful now.

David, in Psalm 143, is doing the same thing. He is not letting his current discouraging situation cloud his heart with hopelessness and faithlessness. Forgetfulness is one of Satan's best tools against God's people. If we can forget who God is and what He is done, then we can be more easily tempted to turn away from God. God seems so far away when our paths are dark.

It is so important for us as pastors' wives to keep a catalog of God's faithfulness to our husbands, our church, our family and ourselves. Instead of being like Job's wife with her "Curse God and die" response to calamity, we shout out our proofs of God's faithfulness to our husbands. While much of our time here

at CHBC has been wonderful, there have been a few very dark days when even Mark was discouraged.) That's saying a lot because he is such an optimist!) It was wonderful to sit down next to him and remind HIM (usually it's the other way around), of God's past faithfulness and how we could apply those with complete confidence as hope for His future faithfulness.

At the end of the day, take time to reflect upon how God has shown His faithfulness to you in giving you strength and preparing you for all that He had in store for you. This can be anything from a prayer before you go to bed to a conversation with your husband and family about it over dinner to an entry in your journal or space on your calendar.

Ask your husband how he saw God's faithfulness to him in his ministry during the day and thank God for all He did. Taking time to be grateful is not only right and good and pleases God, but it helps us to have a truer perspective on even the hardest day. Remembering with gratitude is one of the most powerful weapons God gives us to see Him better and to even change our hearts in the light of His goodness. Even by adding a brief time of reflecting upon God's faithfulness to your dinner time conversation, you can encourage others in their faith and can encourage them to reflect upon God's faithfulness to them each day, too.

These are not just great ways for us to grow in gratitude for God's good gifts each day, but are powerful reminders that our God is faithful and will be faithful to tell us what He wants us to do and give us the strength to do it, all the way home.

There is an old hymn called "Count Your Blessings" that is similar to this idea.

Count Your Blessings

1 When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

Refrain:
Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your blessings, see what God hath done;
Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your many blessings, see what God hath done.

2 Are you ever burdened with a load of care?
Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?
Count your many blessings, ev'ry doubt will fly,
And you will be singing as the days go by. [Refrain]

3 When you look at others with their lands and gold,
Think that Christ has promised you His wealth untold;
Count your many blessings, money cannot buy
Your reward in heaven, nor your home on high. [Refrain]

4 So, amid the conflict, whether great or small,
Do not be discouraged, God is over all;
Count your many blessings, angels will attend,
Help and comfort give you to your journey's end. [Refrain]

--Author: Johnson Oatman

UNSHAKEN: SEEING SIGNS OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

Remembering past faithfulness is taking your mind and panning backwards through your life. Looking for signs of God's sovereignty is setting a time-lapse camera on what is going on around you today. It is another part of God counseling us about His faithfulness that helps us go on trusting Him to give us everything we need for our current situation and all the home to heaven with Him.

In the Wintergreen story, it was cherishing the yellow lines that He used to basically saved my life that night. Someone had laid down those lines earlier, with not a thought of me or my need. Yet there they were that foggy night to keep me on the road and to get me home.

It can be as simple as reminding yourself that God made the sun rise yet again and has given you life. It can be noticing good things He is doing today in those around you. It is thinking about what you have that helps you through your current situation and remembering when that was put in place. When things seem so out of control, I love to disprove my perspective this way.

Naomi and the barley harvest is another great reminder for us. Naomi told her friends to rename her Marah (bitterness) because of all the terrible things that happened to her in Moab. She was sure God had abandoned her. But she only need look around and see the barley harvest. God had been growing that barley long before she arrived in Bethlehem. He allowed it grow thick and tall and ready for the sickle at just the time she and Ruth came. God guided Ruth to Boaz's fields and the rest is history. Not only is Naomi NOT abandoned, but she becomes great grandmother to King David and a future child in her line would be Jesus, Himself!

With God, there's always a barley harvest around us. And it will not be just to encourage our husbands and us today, but to continue to bear fruit for His church into the future.

This can be especially encouraging for pastors trying to make good changes in their church but facing much opposition. It can be so hard to know when to move forward and when to be patient. What if they make the wrong decision? Will they harm the very church they long to restore to greater health? To remember that God has called them to this church and that He is at work for the good of His church, can help them keep going. They are not alone! This is God's work and they are only a part of what He will use to accomplish all that He wants to accomplish.

The wonderful thing about a God who is sovereign is that there He has such perfect timing. There is an old song that says, "God is never there when you want Him to be, but He's always right on time." And so He always is!

UNSHAKEN: CLINGING TO GOD, MOMENT BY MOMENT

We see David asking for light on his path, right where he is Psalm 23:1,2,4; Psalm 37:23-24

That foggy night going up Wintergreen Mountain, I didn't enjoy the usual visibility I was accustomed to. I was forced to open my car door and look at what was right below my feet so that I could safely drive my car the next few yards. But the point is, I still had what I needed to do what I needed to do and to get safely home, even if it was by feeling my utter weakness.

David's song provides us with a wonderful picture of God's counsel for our lives. There are times when He helps us to see clearly, even way up the road. But even when the seemingly impossible, much "foggier" conditions, He still gives us what we need to make out the path at our feet. We can always trust God to

counsel, to instruct us. He makes known the path of life to us, mile or inch at a time, as is best. He can do that because he made the road. He put the lines on the middle-of-the-road and the lines on the side of the road and he gives us eyes to see that there is a path that he is directing us along. He counsels us with what we need in the way we need for His good purposes and fills us with what we need to persevere all the way home.

Number one, and most importantly: this life is about knowing God and enjoying Him forever he intends to use everything in this life to help us do that. He intends to use everything from our greatest gifts and most beautiful godliness down to our deepest weaknesses and biggest struggles to grow us closer to Him so that we might know Him and enjoy him more —even our struggles with anxiety.

And this is eternal life to know you… John 17:3

> "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

The bigger our weakness, the more we must go to Him. Sometimes I think we act like God minds this. Like He wants to help us to grow up and be independent. While this is true with parents and their children. This is not true of God with His children. We were meant to grow up INTO greater knowledge of Him, dependence upon Him and enjoyment of Him.

He loves for us to be constantly coming to Him, whether it is for strength or forgiveness or rescue or faith. He made us to come to Him. And as we come to Him, He gives us what we need, whether its wisdom to know what to do, or the strength to do what He wants us to do.

As the "weatherman," God could always keep the clouds away and give us long sight, but He doesn't. Not because He's unkind, but because He isn't just counseling us, He is instructing us through life. And as He instructs, He constructs us. Since the Fall, humans have been trying to throw off God's rule for independence. God kindly shows us our need for Him and beckons us back to Him through our neediness. Our daily dependence upon Him is the cord of love that draws us into closer fellowship with Him.

From John 15:

> "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser...Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

We might like to receive counsel and strength for the year or the month, the week or even the day. But God gives it to us in the dose He knows is best for what He calls us to and is creating in us. He will give your husband what he needs to lead the church well. He will give him what he needs to keep on loving the sheep even when they bite back. He will give you what you need to support your husband. And if it is by thimble-full instead of boatload, that wisdom and grace, know that it is Him drawing you near with cords of love.

God set up this world in such a way that we would daily declare our dependence upon Him, and thereby daily grow our closeness to Him, and see more and more aspects of His goodness. And THAT He uses to bring great glory to Himself, and great enjoyment to us. The heavens may declare the glory of the Lord every day in their way, but God has made our needy little lives inextricably intertwined with His great self, so that not only we might enjoy His fellowship but make even (and maybe especially) the darkest night simply a backdrop for a spectacular firework display of His faithfulness and His good workings, in

this world, in our lives, and in the lives of others. David was right: apart from God we have no good thing. The closer we are to Him, the more we know that is true.

We might like God to come to our rescue and bring us immediate victory or one time fixes all, like making the Jerico walls come tumbling down with just a shout. But the truth is, I am made to go back to God over and over for His help. My need for Him is to fill my dry, desolate life with His sufficiency over and over, like receiving daily manna to survive in the wilderness. Does all of our needs seem like annoying clamor to God? No, they do not! This is what He made us for. To be dependent on Him. This is what He loves.

Great frequency might feel only like great weakness. And is certainly shows great weakness but when you go and get real food frequently. It cannot help but grow you.

Sometimes something scares me so much because it looks so big, I think there's no way I can do it. I love to avoid things like this. But God in his kindness many times gives me times when I cannot avoid it.

This was especially true when I was going through my cancer treatment, in 2014, and through repeated complete paralysis in 2025. I had no choice but to go through it. It was so frightening. And even though sometimes the fear was so overwhelming, I learned to go back to the Lord over and over again for the next moment's relief. He not only bore me through it, but He grew me through it, too. He certainly taught me that when things look really big, I need to break them down into very, very small pieces. Then, to look to Him to carry me through each of those tiny pieces, and in the process, get through to the end.

I saw Him always give me strength, but it often came by dropper full instead of boatload. Why? I think because sinfully, receiving help by the boatload makes me feel more independent of Him. And somehow, in my distorted spiritual heart, that feels safer than having to be so very dependent, moment by moment, upon Him. How kind God is! How He treats us gently through our weaknesses! How He is always faithful to provide for us in our weakness and bring us along to Himself, drop by drop.

> "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." --Lamentations 3:22–24

UNSHAKEN: ALL THE WAY HOME

There was no happier sight for me than the lights of our house that foggy night at Wintergreen. My fight with the road and the darkness and the fog was over. All that was left were those wonderful feelings of being safely home and gratitude to God for helping me get there, every step of the way. I could not wait to celebrate and share what He had done for me.

David might have been "in the dark" as to where to find his next safe step, but he was confident that God would always provide what was needed. In verse 8 David says: "I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken." "At my right hand" means always there to help.

But then did you notice in verse 11 that David says, "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." "At God's right hand" means to be given a place of honor and blessing.

David knew that God would help him every day of his life, giving him the wisdom and strength to do all that God wanted him to do, until the day God would take him home to enjoy the pleasures of being with God in perfect fellowship forever.

What David knew in part, we know so much more fully. We know the story of the Savior who came, lived, died and rose again. He has gone ahead of us and longs for us to be with Him and see Him in His glory. And not only see Him in His glory, but actually for us to be glorified by Him. Free from sin, suffering and death at last. Perfect in fellowship with Him and with His bride, the whole Church. Then, we will at last really be what David could only imagine with eyes of faith: "the glorious ones in the land in whom is all of his (and our) delight." (Psalm 16:3)

What wonderful three things will be included in that fullness of pleasures at his right hand does Psalm 16 say? Full growth. Full glory. Full relief. The battles will be over. The victory won. And the swords will be beaten into plowshares because there will never be another war again.

God will never stop helping me until I am formed into the image of his Son. Part of that forming will take place here on earth. But that beautiful rest. That root system that keeps sprouting up dandelions will be torn out completely when we go to be with him. The battle is fierce, but the victory is won.

Really, this whole song is listening in to David asking the Lord to counsel him and carry him all through life and all the way home. David is praying to the Lord. David is preaching to himself about the Lord. David is remembering what the Lord has done. David is remembering God's goodness and seeing His sovereignty in all the things the Lord has put in his life and the things he's protected him from. David sees the Lord has given him companions to help him.

And because of all this, he is confident that God will help him know what to do and will give him the strength to do it—not only in his current situation and every day of his whole life. David will not be abandoned. His soul and his body will rest secure all the days of his life. And as David says in a similar passage from Psalm 23:6 "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Why is Psalm 16 in God's Word? Because the Lord didn't mean it just to be a song of David's own, beautiful inheritance. God meant it to be a song of ours, too. The same God who led David through every day of his life, from brightest day with cup overflowing to the darkest valley of the shadow of death itself, also promises to be with us, our husbands, and all His people.

He will help our husbands know how to lead and love His people. He will give them strength to love them long and hard. And God will help us to support them in these roles, too. For surely God's goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives. And surely God will not only bring us safely into His house forever but use us to bring many others to that house, as well. And together, we will praise God and celebrate how He brought each of us through the storms of life and safely home with Him.

A dear friend, Kasey Gurley, and I adopted a phrase that I think David would have approved of: "Because of who God is, there are only two kinds of days: good days and good fighting days. And who can say which is the better: the easy days we enjoy or the hard days in which we grow?

Carry on, sister! Fight the good fight! Love even when it is hard. Delight in God's people and delight in God and His plans! God is so good and heaven is coming. Your husband and you are working in the mines of eternity. The treasures will far outweigh any difficulty we will ever face. They are far more beautiful than anything we can imagine.

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." --Revelation 21:3-4

He Gives More Grace

1. He gives more grace when the burdens grow greater,
He gives more when the increase,
To added affliction, He multiplies mercy.
To multiplied trials, His peace.

2. When we have exhausted our store of endurance
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources
His giving is only begun

Refrain
He gives more grace every morning
His strength to give every day
And His love will carry us through the night
To the dawn of His glorious day

3. Fear not that your need shall exceed His provision
Our God ever yearns His resources to share
Lean hard on the arm everlasting, availing
You and Your glory will bear

4. His love has no limits, His grace has no measure
His power is boundless, we know not it's end
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He gives and gives again

Words: Annie Johnsom Flint
Music, Verse Adaptions and Refrain: Constance Dever