

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 invite 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 them 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?
- Will 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 want 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.