



You and him: those true love ways

A pastor's wife and her husband

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Introduction

Before we start talking about being married to a pastor, we need to talk about marriage itself. In these days of pre-nuptial contracts, the very concept of marriage has been skewed as well as legally re-defined.

The individualism which is seen as the unquestioned right of the twenty-first century person is a product of the Enlightenment, industrialisation, Marxism, feminism and the championing of sexual so-called 'freedom' and it has taken its toll. This is evidenced in the waning of popularity of marriage itself. And where marriage happens, there is an unspoken thought in the mind of every bride and groom who walk down the aisle: 'you make me happy and I am now giving you the opportunity to make me happy for the rest of your life.'

That is not Biblical marriage. In the Bible, marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman to do life together, as a co-dependency, a complementary unit, using their God-given differences to serve and help each other to fulfil God's purposes on earth. (Genesis 1:28; Genesis 2:18). The rampant individualism which goes unchallenged in the twenty-first century runs counter to family life as God designed it. It is the counsel of the ungodly and Psalm 1 tells us where that goes.

So here you are married to the pastor. And the fact is that you covenanted before God to be his faithful helper. Now the Bible teaches male headship (for the flourishing of the wife, incidentally - Ephesians 5:27) but only an idiot of a man would pursue such a calling without talking and praying it through with his wife. So let us assume that has been done. There is therefore a sense that you are part of the package because you are joined to the man. What follows are ways in which that can be done gladly and cheerfully as an expression of your love and respect for him and for his calling. It could be looked on as crucial maintenance for the man who is in the front line for God.

Practical care

Behind every great man is a cupboard you want to get into. Isn't that the truth? Sharing the work of survival in ministry has a very practical aspect. A lot of what you do as a minister's wife is the hidden work of supplying his bodily needs. Practical kindness to God's servant serves God's kingdom.

There is a very fine example of this in 2 Kings 4. The unnamed woman here is not Elisha's wife, but she knows how to care for God's servant in a practical way. We can learn from her.

It all starts with the provision of a meal. Surely this rings true. Feed the man! Elisha has an itinerant ministry: he needs fuel, and he needs a welcoming table - both. Note the word 'urge' in verse 8. She urged him to stay for a meal, possibly recognising his needs more than he did himself. And note the regularity of the pattern: 'whenever he passed by, he stopped to eat.' What a comfort and help that must have been to God's servant to know that there would be a good meal prepared for him. Practical, everyday kindness is of great use in the kingdom.

The woman took her provision further. She has a very womanly idea to provide Elisha with a good place to rest and to work: a bed, a table and chair, even a lamp. Apparently, Elisha appreciated it. This hardworking man with a difficult job to do in very difficult times, was blessed by finding a hearty meal put in front of him and a space to call his own.

I know a man who believes that the worst six words in the English language are, 'I thought we'd just have salad.' That may not be your husband; you may be married to a man who finds it therapeutic to don the apron and reach for the knife and chopping board. Fine. Step aside for Master Chef. But there will be other practical ways in which you can make him very glad to step through the front door. Sometimes your husband will need space or recovery time after tussling with his exegesis or visiting a very needy church member.

It is very fashionable for women to decry housework or to state with pride that they rarely do any, but it is very Biblical to bring order out of chaos and make a home welcoming and attractive, as did the Proverbs 31 wife of noble character. The government would have us believe that the only work worthy of the name is one which draws a wage that can be taxed. That is a lie.

In the Bible, the primary purpose of work is to be useful. Home management is an extremely valuable contribution to the well-being of everyone who enters that home. It is both art and science and no woman should be ashamed if she eschews paid work in order to give time and attention to making the home a safe haven for her family - a place they leave refreshed and to which they gladly return. That is as significant a ministry as teaching Sunday School or playing the piano for services.

Emotional care

There is also important work to be done when the Marigolds and Magimix are put away. Another way of helping is by listening and talking to your husband. Who pastors the pastor? Very often, that'll be you. What follows are two contrasting examples from Scripture of womanly/wifely input, for better or worse.

a. *Abigail (2 Samuel 25)*

She gets an A* for the practical stuff. There is her husband, Farmer Nabal, red-faced and angry, shouting "Get off my land" at the news that David and his band are in the vicinity. When David's friendly overtures are rebuffed, he and his men are strapping on their swords. The place is awash with testosterone and a lot of blood is about to soak the fields around Carmel. Abigail Wisdom gets busy in the pantry and loads up a wagon or two. That's the food bit. But her words to David are also critical. Wisdom is on her tongue and her words are a masterclass in gentle respectful tact and God-centred reasoning. She helps David to see things from a better perspective. Outcome: lives are saved. Now it is a moot point, how much a man in ministry should share with his wife. There may be confidentiality issues, or he may want to protect her from some stuff. But sometimes he will need to unload or just think out loud as he processes some of the things he is dealing with. At this point a God-fearing wife may be able, with gentleness and respect, to offer insights and perspective which will help. Such insights may be critical. But her listening ear is the thing.

b. *Michal (2 Samuel 6)*

Here is a counter example, also from the life of David, now king. Michal's initial passionate love for her husband, David, has gone sour. Her heart was not for God and his kingdom but only for status and reputation. When David joyfully led the procession restoring the ark to Jerusalem, Michal sneered at David's exuberant celebrations. Her ugly, angry heart was exposed (v 20). By her words and attitude, she wrecked her marriage and damaged herself. This is what can happen when there is no sharing of the work.

There is a Chinese proverb which says, 'same bed, different dreams'. No, not in proper Biblical marriage and especially not in ministry marriage. Same bed, same dreams, for God's glory.

Bed is important too. Sex is important for the emotional care of a man. It is intended for the strengthening of love, commitment and unselfishness in marriage. Certainly 'get one free' applies here, according to 1 Corinthians 7. Even in the area of sex there is to be interdependence. The covenant of marriage relinquishes exclusive rights over

your body. Marriage means giving, in every area. Out with individualism and power plays. In with equality and mutuality. You belong to each other.

Abstinence is permissible but only on a temporary basis and for the other great together thing: prayer. Abstinence is to be a shared decision, not scoring points or for a convenience. The fact that Satan is mentioned in this connection (v5) reminds us that he has opportunity to cause great havoc when couple get this wrong. There have been too many notorious instances in recent years of ministers who have had a spectacular fall because of failures in this area. And thus, goals are scored for the other team and Satan is on the terraces, cheering and jeering.

On the other hand, a good sex life glorifies God and a generous seeing-to will make your husband feel better physiologically, emotionally and mentally, and therefore more resilient to trouble, better equipped to face challenges, more inclined to be generous. In other words, ministry will be enhanced.

Spiritual care

A vital way in which a pastor's wife can care for her husband is to pray for him. None is in more spiritual danger than one in the front line of gospel ministry. Cook for him, make love to him, pray for him: another hidden work. If you don't pray for him, who will? When we fail to pray for our husbands, we are not recognising their desperate need.

2 Timothy 2 gives us some helpful pictures to use when we pray:

a. *Soldier*

Pray for him as a soldier (2Timothy 2:3-4). Think of him in battle dress, a man under orders. A favourite picture book for me and my children was the Aalborg classic 'Peepo'. It depicts a baby in a pram in a World War II setting. There is a subtext going on of a daddy on leave and about to return to the front. Of this the baby is blissfully unaware. It is just home life with plenty going on for the baby to observe. But the parent reader sees the poignant side. Here is a man in uniform about to go and face the enemy. These are dangerous times. So, with your husband in ministry. Pray for his protection and strength to endure the hardship, with an eye always to please his commanding officer - not this or that grumpy church member.

b. *Athlete*

Pray for him as an athlete (2Timothy 2:3-4). He needs to keep on running; he is in a marathon, not a sprint. Also, he must compete according to the rules. In the 2011 Kielder Marathon in Northumberland, a runner named Rob Sloan came third. But the result was queried by the man who came fourth. Subsequent investigation showed that Rob Sloan diverted from the route and caught a bus for part off the way... Pray that your husband will maintain integrity of heart. Gold medal Olympic athletes often say that the medal is not about the day of the race. It's about the getting up before dawn on cold wet mornings and doing the training, day after day, week after week. Pray that your husband will have the discipline to pursue Christ, resolutely spending time in scripture and prayer, not for flashy sermons but for godliness, which is McCheyne famously said, is the church's greatest need.

c. *Farmer*

Pray for him as a farmer (2Timothy2:6). The imagery changes: off with the Lycra, on with the overalls and wellies. Pray that your husband will have the patience of a farmer to faithfully sow and wait for the harvest. Diligence is the keyword here: doing the bits he doesn't like as well as the bit he does. Pray that he will give himself

as thoroughly and prayerfully to the deacons meeting as to the studying, or to the visiting as to the preaching.

Money can't buy this kind of support: practical, emotional, spiritual.
Be proud to be the get-one-free wife.