

Peace in the Parsonage

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A Handbook for Pastors' Wives

Growing Life Ministries

Princeton, MA 01541

www.growinglife.org

Peace In The Parsonage

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*Dedicated to
my husband, Harvey,
whose love and support have
made it possible for me to
obey God's call.*

PEACE IN THE PARSONAGE

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INTRODUCTION

No one ever said that being the wife of a minister would be easy or that the parsonage would always be a place of peace. In fact, a newspaper article revealed some startling statistics regarding the average ministerial family. It declared that more pastors are leaving the ministry than ever before. The pressures are too great. Marriages are breaking up, children are leaving the church with no intention of returning, wives are cracking under the load, and pastors are becoming involved in immoral relationships.

No longer is the pastor one who simply prepares a sermon for Sunday, a Bible study for Wednesday night and a Sunday school lesson. No longer are leisurely afternoons visiting, sipping tea, eating cookies, and giving a pastoral blessing to each household considered his normal routine.

A myriad of details must be attended to in the daily routine of pastoral ministry. Tax laws, insurance claims, counseling, employee demands, and physical care of the facilities, properties, and equipment all eat into the pastor's week. Just making sure the sound equipment, computers, and copy machines are running may call for mechanical expertise beyond his experience and training.

The pastor today must be mobile, on the move, in touch. He must be ready to listen with compassion, pray with power, preach with the anointing, counsel with wisdom, keep a staff motivated and productive, and, of course, keep his family a priority.

As an American pastor's wife for more than 38 years, I have seen and felt the changes. Perhaps some change is due to the prosperity of America: more people, more automobiles, more money, more leisure time, more drug- and alcohol-related

problems, more free sex, and more relaxing of restraint in a myriad of areas.

THE ELUSIVE DREAM

I entered the ministry with stars in my eyes, a dream in my heart, and a desire to serve the Lord all of my life. The desire has not changed; in fact, it has increased. But the stars have long ago been removed by the realities of life.

Today, I recognize how limited we are in scope of ministry during a lifetime, how brief is our time to work for the Lord, and how dependent we are on His blessing and on the reception of the people to whom we minister. At the same time I have a growing consciousness of the eternality of the attitudes and spirit I am developing. I am aware that this preparation time has an everlasting effect upon my future reward and also on the lives of my children and those individuals I have touched through the years.

To the young and older pastor's wife, struggling to bring some kind of balance to her life and home; to Lori, Debbie, Donna and Ruth, Arlene, Lillian and Nancy--may I share what I have learned? If it helps make your dream a reality and your ministry more effective, I will be forever grateful.

LESSONS IN PRAYER

I grew up in a Christian home. Mom and Dad were active lay people in our church and supported it with all their strength. They also lived their lives for the Lord in front of their children, even when the doors were closed and no one else was watching. Jesus was important to them.

My earliest recollections of prayer were times when my two sisters and I carried our little chairs to the living room for family altar. As I grew up, my prayers of "Now I lay me down to sleep" and "God is great, God is good," became prayers of intercession for family members: "Lord, save Uncle Leroy

before it is too late!" Vividly I recall times when the presence of the Lord was powerful and sweet...all at the family altar.

When I was a young teenager, Mom became youth leader in the church. There were few young men in the body and Mom made a commitment (which I learned of after the results were in) to pray daily *at the church* that God would send them in. This meant a walk of about four blocks, and she went regardless of rain, snow, heat, or cold. At the end of that year there they were perhaps a dozen strong, sharp, young men, college and high school age sitting in a row with their arms interlocked across the pew. My heart believed. God answers prayer.

Is it any wonder all three of we "Hussey girls" went to Bible school, married preachers, and entered the ministry? The ministry was precious. God was real. We had seen Him at work.

EARLY TRAINING

My home church gave opportunity for us to grow. We were taught to never say no when asked to do something for the Lord. We sang specials, participated in the youth services, helped with vacation Bible school, and taught Sunday school classes.

In fact, at 13 years old I began teaching preschoolers and continued in that class all through high school. I loved those kids. I interacted with them and prayed for them. I was challenged as I prepared the lessons, decorated my classroom, and phoned absentees. One little boy was determined to marry me some day and was not happy as he attended my wedding before he had time to grow up.

After all of this training and support, it would seem that ministry would come easy and I would automatically know who I was and where I was headed. I wanted to be a pastor's wife ever

since my own pastor's wife gave me piano lessons in her home.

I wanted to do what she did. The stars in my eyes regarding ministry mercifully kept me from seeing the struggles that would be involved in the pursuit of a godly home and a heart at peace with God and with people. The Psalmist, David, knew what he was saying when he instructed, "seek peace and pursue it" (Psalm 34:14), for the life of peace requires effort and determination.

Chapter One

LIVING AT PEACE WITH YOURSELF

Isaiah 26:3: "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you."

THE CALL

Just having the title "pastor's wife" does not necessarily mean a person has had a lifelong desire and call to be one. Some may have even resisted the position or tried to persuade their husband to try another kind of ministry. Perhaps his call came after the "I do" was said and she felt she had no choice in the matter. How many beautiful gals have given up ever becoming a good pastor's wife because they felt they could not measure up to the role thrust upon them? They couldn't play the piano, sing a solo or host an elegant dinner. But be encouraged. God has a standard uniquely yours. It's not unreachable and it's not one that will push you down, wear you out, and throw you away.

According to a survey done in the 60's (and I am not so sure this has changed much), less than 20 percent of pastors' wives see themselves as called as their husbands--as copastor or team worker. These individuals thrive on the ministry, love it, and if they had never married would have chosen it as their own life's work.

Over 60 percent of ministry wives see themselves as supportive but not as a teamworker or copastor. At times they love it but sometimes they can't stand it. They want to be helpful but prefer to maintain some personal interests outside the church.

About 17 percent (3 or 4 in 20) feel no call and want no involvement with their husband's calling. They attend church but stay out of leadership positions and will never be a part of it.

Less than 5 percent remain completely detached, in rebellion, and miserable. In this case the pastorate will probably be short-lived as the parishioners absorb the unhappiness of the pastoral couple.

THE PRESSURE IS ON

Few professions, if any, make as many demands of the spouse of the professional as does the pastoral ministry. How many patients meet the wife of their doctor? How many clients must accept or even get acquainted with the wife of their lawyer? Have you ever met the wife of your pharmacist, your plumber, or your grocer?

Pastors' wives must not only *meet* their husbands' counselees, parishioners, board members, and department heads; they must serve them willingly, help them in times of trouble, worship with them, listen to them complain (sometimes against the goals their husbands hold dear) and even love them. Additionally, they must win their approval by the way they dress, the way they fix their hair or wear (or not wear) their makeup, and by the way they raise their children. That's pressure.

FINDING A PLACE OF PERSONAL FULFILLMENT

If the pastor's wife is to fulfill the desire of her heart to serve the Lord effectively, she must find some area of ministry where she can grow and develop. She must find an outlet...a place to express her faith and convictions and to affect the Kingdom in a personal and positive way. Whether or not we are called to be a spiritual leaders, as Christians we are *all* called to live an overcoming life and to use our gifts for blessing the body of Christ (James 1:27).

Those pastors' wives who feel personally *called* to ministry, will more easily find a place of contentment and fulfillment. Those who are among the 60 percent who prefer to remain a little less involved, will have to work harder to find their own niche.

We bring into the ministry all the baggage accumulated during our growing up years, including the feelings of insecurity and self-doubt. If we are to stand and be secure in ministry, we must know that not everyone has the same calling, talents, or strength. We cannot be or do what our mothers or the former pastor's wife did or what everyone in the world expects of us for God has made us unique and has gifted us according to His plan for our lives.

Know Your Own Talents

God has given every believer a "measure of grace," certain abilities, and a particular combination of talents that makes that person what God intended him/her to be (Romans 12:6). God holds us responsible only for that which He gives us. The one who received five talents received the same commendation as the one who had 10 because he used what he had to the best of his ability (Matthew 25:14-23).

What is it you enjoy doing? What brings you pleasure in the Lord's work? Paul, in his instructions to the young minister Timothy, said, "God...richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment" (1 Timothy 6:17). Whatever it is that brings you great joy is possibly the "rod" in your hand that God will use (Ecclesiastes 9:10; Exodus 4:2).

Get alone. Search your heart. Prayerfully ask yourself some direct questions and identify the talent lying within you. Once that is done you can proceed into your area of Christian service with enthusiasm and joy and without guilt for the things you don't do well. Perhaps the following set of questions will get you started:

--Is there a deep desire in your heart to keep God's people on the straight and narrow? Do you weep over sin and long to speak out for the right? Do you feel compelled to confront wrong situations in a straight-forward manner?

--Do you like to see that everyone is cared for in practical ways? Do you notice and take care of the empty dishes or full trash barrel or the person who is struggling to juggle a cup of coffee? Do you see helping people with their physical need of clothes, food, and shelter, as basic to the ministry?

--Do you love to read and study and dig for truths? Is there a longing in your heart to share what the Lord is teaching you? Do you see the Word and its principles as the answer to people's problems?

--Do you like being with people? Would you rather mix freely with newcomers and show yourself friendly than to retire to your own little circle of friends or family? Do you like practical application of Scripture that gives steps to spiritual growth and development?

--Do you have a knack for saving money, earning extra dollars, or turning trash into treasures? Do you respond sacrificially to the financial need of some person or ministry? Are you willing to live frugally in order to give to a desperate need somewhere?

--Do you enjoy planning ahead, laying out a schedule or a program, putting people in appropriate slots? Is it easy for you to see the overview of what needs to be done and who fits where in the doing of the task?

--Do you experience great compassion and hurt when others hurt? Do you feel the spirit of a group of people, especially if someone there is discouraged or depressed?

Compare this list of seven areas of questions with the seven gifts mentioned in Romans 12:6-8 (prophecy, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, and showing mercy). Somewhere in these questions you found yourself. You found the basic, motivating gift from which you can build a personal ministry that will be fulfilling and productive. Begin moving in that direction. Experiment and develop this talent. Read about it. Observe it in others. Note how it works.

It will never be possible to be and do all that members of your congregation think you should. Perhaps you feel inadequate to be what your husband desires or even to keep up with your own expectations of the role of a pastor's wife, but if you know what *God* wants of you, and if you find joy in that, you will survive outside pressure to perform.

That is not to say you'll never do anything outside your area of giftedness, but those works will be done as extra love gifts to the body of Christ. The many duties that demand attention for the ongoing of the church can easily be relinquished to another person as soon as possible, without feelings of guilt or failure if you are content to work within the area of your giftedness and calling.

Experience helps us understand that a person will usually respond or feel drawn to two or even three of the motive gifts listed in Romans 12, but one of them will become dominant as a person matures and grows in ministry. All other tasks will reflect this underlying motive. As various responsibilities are assumed, they will be done within the boundaries of that gift.

For example: any person may be called upon to teach a Sunday school class but that task will be done from the base of a person's motive gift. A person with a *teaching* motivation will pursue the background of the lesson, the meaning of a word or history of the Bible story in detail. The *encourager* will look for ways to apply the lesson to each pupil in practical ways and will

be most concerned with how each one responds to the teaching for his basic motivation is to encourage people.

Also, ministries that bring fulfillment will grow and change with time and according to personal obligations, health, and maturity.

Example: As a young PW I truly loved teaching 3-year-olds, sitting on the floor with them, and singing "Climb, climb up sunshine mountain." But as I dug into the Scripture and experienced its power in my life, I longed for the opportunity to share the Word on an adult level. This was also influenced by the fact that as my children grew, I was released to spend more time in study. In addition, maturity gave me credibility with adults as I experienced and survived the demands of time and the crises of life.

Talents are gifts given by the Holy Spirit according to His will (Hebrews 2:4). He has given us every talent we will ever need to do *His* will and fulfill *His* purpose completely (Hebrews 13:21). He does not demand what He has not given. What freedom that should bring to us.

Know Your Limitations

John the Baptist knew he was *not* the Christ or the prophet Isaiah. He was simply a voice (John 1:20-23). He had purpose--to cry out in the wilderness. He was not called to the city, to great temples, to kings, or priests. Neither was he asked to go to Nineveh or Rome.

Understanding the call of God leads us to accept the limitations of that call. We must serve Him within the confines of limited time, talent, strength, and circumstance.

We Are Limited by Time:

Perhaps the only way we are created equal is that our days are of equal length--24 hours--no more, no less, regardless of the

demands of family, church, or self. Only on rare occasions, in fact, only twice, with Joshua (Joshua 10:12,13) and Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:11), has God ever caused the sun to stand still for a human being's ministry, however vital that might be.

To think that we can stretch time in order to do the work of three people is a fallacy and will bring us to weariness and burnout. Neither can we go back in time to erase or change something in the past or forward to a time when we will be more able to cope. We have no such time machine available to us.

How *many* days we will have is also in the hands of the Lord, and we will be limited in ministry by that number. God does not ordinarily tell us ahead of time how long we can expect to live and serve Him. Our minds do not comprehend God's timing. We question why a young, vibrant soldier of the cross dies what we term an untimely death, but God has each day of our lives planned (Psalm 139:16) and the number of our days is not for us to choose.

We need to identify those time robbers that keep us from fulfilling our call and purpose: the phone, the TV, endless reading of newspapers and magazines, unnecessary errands, and careless habits. With careful planning and prayer we can learn to consolidate our tasks, lessen our wasted hours, and conserve our strength for the more important work. Time is a gift, entrusted to us by the Lord according to His wisdom. Jesus is interested in such detail and the Holy Spirit will help us if we ask Him to direct our path each day. Lord, help us to "number our days aright" (Psalm 90:12), to use them wisely, and to accept the limitations of time.

We Are Limited by Talents:

No one person has been given every talent. That is why we need fellowship with all of God's people. *Together* we make

up the body. Alone we are only one part. *Together* we are able to fulfill God's plan. Alone we flounder and fail.

Only Jesus was given the Spirit "without limit" (John 1:14; 3:34). He moved freely in every one of the motive gifts and demonstrated this in the way he called the people to repentance, served them so humbly, taught them the deeper truths, encouraged the one floundering in His faith, organized the people for better administration, shared the loaves and fishes with the multitude, and showed mercy to the hurting.

We are each given a measure of grace, not *all* the gifts. Other members will have gifts we might like to have but that fact only serves to remind us how much we need each other.

We Are Limited by Strength

Some people seem to have endless energy. Their motivation and stamina are far above average. At the other end of the scale are those who may be physically weak or even handicapped. Are the less energetic or strong loved any less, or, does God relegate them to a secondary place? No. He accepts them where they are and so must we.

God has built into creation times for rest: each day, each week, and special occasions set apart as holidays. In each 24-hour period He has provided several hours of darkness in which we can shut out activity, lay our weary bodies down, and close our eyes to life's burdens. "He grants sleep to those he loves" and sees working late hours and cutting short those hours of sleep as "vain" or "foolish" (Psalm 127:2).

God has set the example of mankind to take one day a week for rest. He blessed that day and made it holy (Genesis 2:2, 3) and never rescinded the command. He knows we are not created to work 7 days a week without rest for He created us with limited strength.

Because He wants us to know joy, He instructed His chosen people, Israel, to enjoy several holidays during the year. They were to be days of rest, pleasure with food, music, and laughter. Time for family and friends to enjoy each other and the world God made (Nehemiah 8:10, 12).

Our own personal level of involvement will be determined at least in part by the physical strength we have. To compare and expect equal output by all can bring discouragement and condemnation. At certain points in life, such as when there are young children in the home, or sickness strikes, or when care is demanded for an elderly parent, we will be unable to function at full capacity. At these times or as youth wanes and energy levels taper off, we must learn to accept the limitations of our human frailty.

We Are Limited by Circumstances

Our ministry may be limited at times by geographic location, living quarters, available transportation, ages of our children, available finances, etc. All must come under scrutiny as we evaluate what we can do for the work of the Lord.

As a PW living in a small trailer home, trying to establish a new church, I did my best to be hospitable to visiting guests. However, the night my husband gave a general open house invitation to the congregation attending a sectional meeting held in our church, we came to know that the limits of our trailer home had to be accepted. Later there would be opportunity for that kind of ministry.

I well remember walking the streets of our little town, pushing a baby carriage, trying to call on some individuals we wanted to win for the Lord. Poor baby. Her feeding time was pushed to the limit and so was I. I wonder today if the Lord saw that as a necessary part of my ministry. I know He saw my heart and my longing to serve Him, but sometimes we sacrifice the peace and

even the salvation of our own children because we fail to accept the limitations of our circumstances.

To fight against situations or limitations, that for the present cannot be changed, brings frustration. There is peace in accepting what we cannot change, even though we look forward to the day when more liberty will be ours. Nothing in this life is truly permanent. How much easier we can accept the hard times if we realize that everything changes in time.

Chapter Two

LIVING AT PEACE WITH YOUR SPOUSE

Isaiah 32:17: "The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever."

The blending of two lives in marriage is seldom without hassles and adjustments. Add to that the effects of life in the limelight and the demands of ministry to people who often have huge problems in their lives and little understanding of pastoral ministry, and you know that being married to a pastor is not easy.

However, pastoral life is certainly not the only occupation that puts pressure on marriage. In fact, it has many pluses. Anyone who works with people or in a management position will be required to put in long hours, carry lots of responsibility, and be ready to go the extra mile when duty calls. That goes with being a leader. Pastoring is not unique in that respect.

BENEFITS

Eternal Values

Being married to the pastor brings with it the blessing of being involved in responsibilities and duties that have eternal value. How much more rewarding it is to teach a little child about Jesus, answer the probing questions of a teenager regarding life, help a young couple set spiritual goals, or give hope to a lonely lady, than to earn a million dollars a year in a dog-eat-dog world working with temporal, materialistic things. Our investment of time and energy into lives that have eternal souls cannot be easily erased by the forces of this world.

An Honorable Position

Holding the position of pastor's wife brings an amount of immediate respect, love, and acceptance within the church and the community. It is true that these benefits will be enhanced or destroyed by the way I perform, but at least I have a positive level at which to begin. The position is an honorable one.

Material Blessings

Although the salary for planting and growing new churches may be inadequate at times, God, through His people, provides material blessings we may never have enjoyed in another profession. Things like trips to Africa and Hawaii, access to the use of a condominium on Miami Beach or a cottage in New Hampshire, or a ship in Boston harbor from which to watch the Fourth of July fireworks have been blessings during our ministry. We have been given lovely meals in homes and restaurants, thoughtful little personal gifts, and special care during times of illness--all gifts of love from grateful parishioners.

A Shared Ministry

The pastor's wife has the privilege and joy of working close to her husband, sharing his vision, and supporting him in his place of ministry. Often they are able to have lunch together or counsel or entertain side-by-side. They can attend seminars together and she sees him at his finest--under the anointing of the Holy Spirit as he preaches. How many wives outside the ministry know nothing of the daily work their husbands do? One wife told me she had never heard her husband of 15 years negotiate a deal, although that is his daily work.

Rich Fellowship

We may complain about the extra work of entertaining missionaries and special speakers, but have you recognized the blessing their lives and conversation bring to the children of the parsonage as well as to your own personal growth? Not a small side benefit of pastoral work.

MARRIAGE DEMANDS COMMITMENT

Scripture accepts the fact that being married demands a commitment of time and effort (1 Corinthians 7:33 & 34) and carries with it the obligation to minister to one's mate (Deuteronomy 24:5; 1 Corinthians 7:5).

James Dobson's book, *Love For a Lifetime*, names over commitment and fatigue as the number one cause of failure in marriage.¹ This fact is just as true in the parsonage as anywhere else. When a husband comes home tired and all used up to a wife who is also tired and drained of energy and enthusiasm, their relationship deteriorates quickly to mundane routine and uninteresting, limited conversation.

We must put forth the effort to save some strength, physical and emotional, for communicating with our mate. How can we be sensitive to his needs or aware of what he is trying to tell us if we are consumed with weariness and have given away all that we have in the way of energy, encouragement, kindness, and even conversation?

Plan ahead. If you are working outside the home or at the church, do your best to get home ahead of the family. Take a few minutes to breathe peace into the household and into your own soul. Take a hot bath, sit on the deck with iced tea, or, lay across the bed and breathe deeply as you talk quietly to the Lord for a few minutes. Give some thought to the evening meal and set the stage for a peaceful supper hour.

Time Commitment

One of the problem areas that we deal with in ministry couples is the extreme of over-commitment to the church versus the needs of spouse and family. Somewhere between a schedule

¹. James Dobson, *Love For A Lifetime* (Pomona, CA.,

that keeps a pastor running late into the night, 7 days a week, and the pastor who seldom leaves the comfort of home and family, there is a balance to be found.

One article revealed that at the height of their early years of marriage, every 6 months Prince Charles and Princess Diana received some 2,000 invitations to visit different places.² Much of the time those social obligations required them to function separately. Seldom do the marriages of pastoral couples have to deal with this magnitude of exposure and demands on their time. Often we can make choices that help put balance into our lives if we will make them wisely.

It may be unreasonable for a pastor's wife to expect her husband to always keep 9-to-5 days and 40-hour weeks for there will always be extra hours and unexpected calls and demands in his schedule. Acceptance of that fact brings peace.

On the other hand, it is *not* unreasonable for a wife to expect one day and another evening each week with the man she has married. In fact, if a marriage is to be fulfilling and lasting, these times should be put on the calendar and guarded as though they were a matter of life and death....for they are.

SETTING THE STAGE

The pastor's wife, who is committed to bringing joy and peace to her spouse, realizes the importance of making their home a safe place to which they can flee from the pressures of ministry.

She will make every effort to see that their place is clean, pleasant, inviting, and free from turmoil and confusion; a place where the basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter are provided willingly and with care; a place where each family member is secure in the fact he/she is accepted and loved.

² Andrew Morton, *Don't Worry About Me, My Marriage Is Fine*, *Good Housekeeping* magazine (The Hearst Corp., New York, N.Y., April, 1991).

In a busy household there has to be someone who takes responsibility for keeping it running smoothly--the laundry done, shirts ironed, milk in the refrigerator for breakfast, and meals on the table regularly. If a wife accepts this as her personal priority, she will find joy in her work and will bring peace to the home.

Other duties will constantly try to infringe upon the time required for providing this haven. A *USA Today* poll discovered that 37 percent of the families questioned did not eat even the evening meal together.³ This is one area a committed wife should guard.

Let nothing and no one destroy this one together time each day. The effort it takes to pull the family, including Dad, together for a regular mealtime will pay off in kids who communicate, a dad who likes to come home, and a Mom who knows she has contributed to it all.

Time spent with the family (husband, children, and extended family members) will strengthen yours and your husband's ministry. Together times do not just *happen*; they must be planned, put on the calendar, and then kept as faithfully as one keeps a dental appointment or a church service schedule. All of our teaching is tested and proved in relationships. A good marriage and happy home in the parsonage will have a profound influence on those to whom we minister.

UNDERSTANDING THE PASTOR

Know His Gifts.

What gift of the Holy Spirit motivates your husband in his work? Of the gifts in Romans 12 it is not possible for one man to have them all. A wife's understanding and acceptance of his gifts can bring great encouragement for he will be happy and

³. Dean Merrill, *Pizza for Breakfast?* (Focus on the Family, Pomona, CA., July 1991)

contented only when he develops and uses his personal gifts to their fullest potential. We cannot manipulate or pressure our husbands to change their giftings to the ones we prefer. An encourager or exhorter will forever be the people person. A teacher will always enjoy his books and research. "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29).

Know His Nature.

No one knows him like you do. If you will, you can read what is behind his words--or lack of words. Is he discouraged? Is he tired? Is he under pressure or upset by some situation? Or is he just feeling contemplative after a day of study and prayer?

After a counseling session with a fighting couple, he may want to be reassured that you are there and that you need him and love him. He may feel irritated by the situation and by his inability to correct it and that may show in agitation he brings to the supper table or by reticence to discuss his day. An understanding wife will support and encouragement and will refrain from making demands at these times.

Understand that spiritual highs make us emotionally vulnerable. After preaching or praying with people the minister's heart is open to hurt, to love, and to the control of outside forces...spiritual or human. Timing is a prime ingredient for living in peace with the pastor. Following a sermon in which he has been mightily used by the Holy Spirit is not the time to present him with a problem. His heart is especially tender and he needs time to close up--to get his defenses in place again and his mind back to the place of coping with everyday situations.

Share and Listen.

If you don't, someone else will. When you have time together for sharing, listen to his heart. Let him dream. Talk about your feelings. Talk about ideas: spiritual and physical, church and

family. Learn to listen without giving answers to everything--without preaching.

The level of her involvement in ministry will certainly determine how much a husband shares with his wife. However, every person needs space. We need room to try new ideas and to fail in them without the critical judgment of those we love. We should not demand that every conversation, every detail of the day, or every plan for the future be shared. Sometimes we are protected by not knowing all.

Have Fun Together.

It may be difficult to do something other than that all-consuming church work, but keeping a balance of interest in life will include a variety of places to go and things to see or do: projects, rides, walks, nature, history.

How many busy pastors and wives feel there just isn't time to take a day off together. Their lives and conversation are totally absorbed in the church until there is little else to talk about. Often there is not money available for a real vacation so the years go by until one day they realize the only thing they have in common is the church work and its people. It is worth the effort to take a few hours alone with each other, pursuing some mutual interest, just to touch each other emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Laugh together. Look at each other. Enjoy each other.

Pray for Your Husband and With Him.

This very human man you have married, with all his own weaknesses and needs, is in a battle against forces that would like to see him fall...principalities and powers of supernatural strength. Being on the front lines of ministry means he will take the brunt of Satan's effort to destroy the church. Prayer is our greatest defense against this enemy.

Set a time for your husband to pray together with you at home and help him keep it. Be persistent. It is difficult for him because prayer is his work. He prays for and with people all day long. He prays for the church, for the community, for the government, for other pastors, for his overseers, for the sick and the needy. But when does he pray for you? I need to hear my husband pray for me and I need to pray for him.

Personal devotions need not be replaced with this prayer time, but even a brief time together in prayer will bring strength to your relationship. Especially if there are children in the home, prayer must be visible, verbal, and frequent.

KEEP YOUR RELATIONSHIP ON COURSE

Let people know you are married. Be near him at the door after a service, sit with him when you can, hold hands, pop in to the office occasionally, or attend staff devotions. Be his friend--kind, understanding, and faithful.

At the same time, be wise. We should ask some pertinent questions regarding our marriage relationship:

--Is he happy to come home to me? Am I an eager sex partner to him or just an endurer?

--Am I free to call him, drop in to his office, open the door when he is with someone or in some meeting (within reason, of course)? Can he do the same with me?

--Do we demonstrate respect and honor to each other in public and in private, expressing words that build the other person?

--When we disagree do we forgive quickly and get on with the matter?

Be Alert to Pitfalls.

Wisdom calls for an awareness of the loss of God's presence. Samson was blinded by his own lust and "he did not know that the Lord had left him" (Judges 16:20).

Jealousy has no place in the life of a Christian partner, and I certainly do not advocate questioning every move a husband-pastor makes. In fact, there must be a great deal of trust and understanding on the part of the pastor's wife when it comes to long, lonely hours, needy people, and emotional women. But at the same time, any man (or woman) can fall morally. The wife of every fallen leader will tell you she didn't think it could happen to them.

Take note. Is there another woman who is always there to meet the needs of your husband--to tease, to talk? Someone who comes early, hangs around the home or the church and gives little surprise gifts to please him or prepares special foods that she knows he likes?

Often the greatest tempter is one you would not expect: not necessarily attractive, she is either too old or too young. Most often the other woman will be a member of the congregation or near the fringes of it. Possibly she is someone conveniently close. At first she comes to him with personal needs and their relationship is a spiritual one. But as he empathizes, intimacy is established and emotional ties are formed.

She seeks to be friends with his wife and close to his children. She wants to know little things about him. She wants to get into his home and near those that love him most. She is never critical of him and in fact (and this should be your giveaway clue), she makes him feel good about himself. Something you should have been doing.

One person told me her counselor said this relationship will begin with the woman's comment, "He's a wonderful pastor,"

then progresses to "You have a wonderful husband," and then "He's a wonderful man." By this time there is a deep attraction going on.

Note any involvement in pornography or perverted sexual desires in your or your husband's life. I do not believe the flaunted teaching that anything goes in the bedroom as long as both parties agree. God-ordained sex is clean, pure, and not harmful in any way. Perversion is perpetuated by feeding our minds with pictures or stories that arouse animalistic passion. To begin down this road guarantees no stopping place for one experience of perversion calls for another of even greater proportion. Ministers and their wives are not exempt.

Secret meetings, closed doors, frequent off-hour emergencies, and times when your husband is unavailable to you could indicate a problem. Insist on openness between you and accountability to each other at all times.

Immorality is not the only temptation that confronts the person who handles the Word of God and deals with things of the Spirit daily. There are other danger signs that spell trouble ahead.

--A loss of awe for the things of God: careless jokes, criticism of leaders, shallow prayers and the taking of spiritual needs lightly.

--Extremely hard preaching, especially focusing on one or two particular areas of sin.

--Restlessness at home, demanding that the TV be on, or that there be visitors and constant activity at all times.

--A sense of invulnerability. A feeling that "I have everything under control and nothing can bring me down." or "Everything is going great."

--A loss of humility before God and before the elders, advisors, district officials, and other figures of authority.

--A feeling of boredom. Goals have been reached, there is nothing else to work for. Loss of motivation.

--A feeling of failure. Desperately discouraged.

Any of the above *may* indicate your husband is in need of help.

He may be battling with a spiritual problem and needs to be pulled back to a more balanced outlook. He may be evading issues that need to be dealt with under the advice and counsel of another minister. Perhaps he has been swallowed up by a heavy schedule and has neglected his own personal devotions and relationship with God. He is in a vulnerable position for temptation or for giving up the ministry.

WHAT CAN A WIFE DO?

Regular meetings with elders who care and to whom he is accountable can be a viable deterrent to failure--moral or otherwise. Sometimes these are not in place and a greater burden falls upon the ministering couple to monitor their own actions and responses.

If you feel that something is awry in your marriage relationship or in the spiritual condition of your husband, go before the Lord in prayer and present the situation openly, honestly. Bare your soul to the Lord first and ask for His divine direction. Search the Word. Spend a number of days specifically praying for guidance.

After prayer, it is essential that you *get your husband's attention*. Let him know that you know there is a problem and that you believe it is potentially serious. This is not the time to trust that it will go away by itself. If at all possible, get him to talk with you about it. Set the stage for this discussion by

arranging for a private place to talk where there are no telephones and no chance of being interrupted by the children or by church members.

Confront the issue as specifically as you can.

Carefully evaluate the options together and commit yourselves to doing whatever is necessary to turn the situation around. The longer the problem has been in the making, the longer you can expect the healing process to take. However, ignoring it or stubbornly refusing to change, assures that the situation will grow worse.

You may discover that an issue or a personality must be dealt with and some drastic changes must be made within the church or in your home. Perhaps you will find that something you have been doing is the root cause for restlessness or possibly your husband feels you have stood in the way of a move he wants to make. Your conversation may reveal that you both need a break from the burden of ministry for a week, a month, or even a year. Or, perhaps a change of location or type of ministry is the answer.

In the case of moral issues (pornography, adultery, or sexual, physical, or mental abuse), the best cure is exposure. You may be threatened with all kinds of retaliation, but these problems are not going to go away by themselves. They must be brought into the open and dealt with. Talk to a trusted friend, someone your husband respects--perhaps another minister whom you have known for many years, a family member, or a professional counselor. *Do not* talk to a girlfriend or a member of your church. For your sake and your husband's, do not remain silent.

PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

Count the cost if you are the one tempted or already involved in an affair outside your marriage. Remember it is possible to be emotionally bound in a relationship without there being sexual

involvement. Due to the increased activity of pastors' wives in leadership positions and in the workplace, more and more women are the enemy's target for moral failure.

Often, the wife of a busy pastor feels neglected and over the years is deeply wounded by the fact that the church and everyone else's problems seem more important to her husband than hers are. An affair or a close friendship is one way to get back at this guy that everyone else thinks is so wonderful. It can be fulfilling and satisfying to have someone else think we are desirable and attractive. Someone who has time to enjoy just being together without the pressure of church related work and talk. Little by little the friendship of another woman or of an attentive male replaces the need for closeness with a spouse and the attachment becomes a deciding factor in how and where we spend our time and our energy.

The only cure for this kind of relationship is to replace it with an active pursuit to rebuild the marriage. This will take effort and time but is worth it in light of the years of heartache that result from the loss of a God-ordained marriage and ministry.

MY MAN

*For many years I've loved him,
this man so true and strong;
From teenage years through joy and tears,
through times of right and wrong.*

*Down many roads, o'er many hills
we've walked life's road together;
Through heat and cold, sun and rain,
it mattered not the weather.*

*Our love has held and carried us
when storms threatened to destroy.
We clung a bit more tightly,
a lonely girl, a frightened boy.*

*Facing fear and disappointment
we have leaned upon the Lord,
And together He has strengthened us
by teaching us His Word.*

*What a privilege, what an honor,
to be blessed with such a love;
His tender arms have held me
like the Father's from above.*

*I have brought him pain and sorrow
with my words so harsh and mean,
But I love him, oh, I love him...
this man on whom I lean.*

*So strong, so kind, so gentle,
so forthright, so sincere,
How can I help but love him...
this man I hold so dear?*

*He is positive and forceful
with ideals of highest style,
And a way with pen and pulpit
to make the sad one smile.*

*His willingness to say, "I'm wrong,"
his laughter, love and care,
Have won my heart and brought me close...
with him my life I share.*

-J.M.

Chapter Three

LIVING AT PEACE WITH YOUR CHILDREN

Isaiah 54:13: "All your sons will be taught by the Lord, and great will be your children's peace."

BE REAL

A Christ-like attitude and a spirit that is in subjection to Him is the best example a parent can offer to his/her children. Unless our relationship with the Lord is cultivated and real, we cannot expect our offspring to buy the Christian message. Proverbs 4:23 tells us to "guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." When things are right within the heart, attitudes, relationships, and even the words we speak reflect righteousness.

We cannot fake spirituality. Words are not nearly as convincing as a life that is consistently Christ-like--honest, forgiving, and humble. It is OK to be wrong, to make mistakes. It is *not* OK to cover up those wrongs and *pretend* to be holy. Children see the phoniness; they hear the public prayers and spiritual words and compare those to what happens in the home. Remarks about people or off color jokes about the things of God send the message that your work in church is just a profession and that Christianity is not a genuine, life-changing experience.

Our relationship to the Lord (or lack of it) will show at home more than anywhere else. No amount of preaching will erase from the preacher's kid's mind what he/she perceived as fakery. Live what you teach or don't teach it. Be real.

BE PRAYERFUL

A few years ago I gave my children (all married by then) a questionnaire in which I asked, "What positive things did Mom and Dad do that helped you or affected your spiritual growth?"

Their answer to me was a surprise. I thought of the youth programs I had worked so hard to involve them in, the vacation Bible schools and Christmas programs, the wonderful books I had exposed them to, and my efforts to keep a nice home.

Our oldest daughter, Debbie, said, "The best thing was time spent at the altar with my parents." Denise, our second daughter, wrote, "I remember Mom and Dad both having prayer times when they were not to be disturbed. My goal is to have my children see that example more."

Our kids already know we are not perfect. They need to see us repentant--before the Lord and before each other. "I'm sorry" and "I'm wrong" will earn respect and love and will bring understanding and peace to the home.

BE A LISTENER

Commitment to being a mom and the time it demands will vary with the age and needs of the children. Years of diapers, midnight feedings, and scraped knees will soon be over, replaced by peer pressure, broken hearts, and dented fenders.

I must demonstrate love and caring on a level understood by the child at this moment. **Now** is the imperative. What is going on today in my child's life? Tomorrow the need will change and we will move on to another challenge. Needs will not wait for my schedule or for a more convenient time. Am I listening today? Our teaching and training are pretty well done by the time a child is 12 years old. By then they know what you believe and what you expect of them. However, the influence of a parent goes on throughout life, be it godly or not.

When asked, "What are the most important things a parent can do to ensure his kids will make it through to a productive adult life, I have to say: #1-be consistent in your own walk with the Lord, and #2-listen. Be there. Be there when he/she is hurt, lonely, confused, or discouraged. Be there for the fun times, the

happy days, the projects. Keep in touch. If you establish talking times early, and keep them going on a regular basis, it will be pretty difficult to lose your child to drugs, immorality, and to the devil.

Kids want to talk. It may have to be in the dark of the room at night, and it will have to be at his/her convenience during those teen years, but they need, and want, someone who understands. We should do a whole lot more listening than talking. Answers often come in sharing.

GUARD YOUR SCHEDULE

Parenting takes time: quality and quantity. The PK (preacher's kid) who goes astray is often the result of a mis-managed schedule and of parents who have no time for the home or the kids. There is no other way to teach, train, discipline, and love our children than to give them our time.

Mealtime can be a great healer. Being together consistently for the dinner hour will bring a security to everyone's life. To know that my physical need for food will be met is wonderful, but to also know that my family will be there to talk, to listen, to accept and love me, is a gift more valuable than gold or silver. It tells me, "I belong." "I am important to someone."

In addition to a daily mealtime together, there should be two or three times a week scheduled for the family. Times that can be counted on, looked forward to, with anticipation. Perhaps an evening for bike-riding, games, eating out, or even a Saturday for household projects like cleaning the house or raking the leaves--as long as it is done together. Times when Mom and Dad talk to the kids as they work or as they play. Times when interruptions are not allowed--like telephone calls that take Dad away for long conversations or the drop-in caller who insists on discussing a problem.

We need special times together. Daily, weekly, and once in a while a longer chunk of time to get away from the routine. Plan your vacation with the kids in mind. What would they enjoy at their present age? A seminar or convention might be your idea of a good time but would be a bore to the kids. If you must, break your vacation into two parts--one for the parents, one for the kids. Just be sure to use the time that is theirs to share with them, play with them, and do the things *they* enjoy.

PROTECT THE SANCTITY OF YOUR HOME

In our home we seldom resorted to taking the phone off the hook, but sometimes I wonder if that would not have been a good thing. One doctor-counselor who did that at every family mealtime said that rarely is there such a dire emergency that it cannot wait until after his dinner hour with his family. Most problems have been days, weeks, or even years in the making and yet Pastor is expected to solve them, or at least deal with them this very moment. Ridiculous! Our kids forever bear the scars of rejection brought about by such sacrifice.

Sometimes the pastor's family is required to live next to, or even inside the church building. If that is the case, you will need extra wisdom and tact to keep your home a retreat from the constant demands of the church and from those few individuals who want to be close at all times.

You may need to train your children (and your husband) that the door remains closed and locked unless arrangements have been cleared with the family to entertain visitors. No one likes to get up in the morning or in the middle of the night and discover there is someone drinking coffee in the kitchen or sleeping on the sofa...yet that may happen with an open-door policy.

This can be handled simply by meeting visitors at the door (which, of course, is locked) and kindly telling them you will meet them in the church in a few minutes if they would like to

see you. This works, too, when teens come to see yours every time before a service is to begin. Simply go to the door and say, "Mary will be right out. Please give us just a few more minutes to get ready."

If this seems harsh or unkind, evaluate it in the light of your survival. Over the long haul a family must have some privacy and must know they have a safe place to which they can go when the pressure is on. Space from the work helps build family togetherness and demands respect from those we serve.

WHEN A PK FALLS

Having said all that, I realize that we have no guarantee that every PK will serve the Lord. In some of the most loving, consistently Christian homes I know, the kids have refused to serve God. As parents, we are not the only ones to blame when our child falls from grace.

A child must bear responsibility for his own actions. In the worst of homes, under dire persecution and hardships, teenagers have served God. Consider Daniel. Taken as a prisoner when just a teenager to a foreign land where he was subjected to severe demands, criticism, and persecution, he still chose to obey His God (Daniel 1). Children must make a personal choice. We cannot make it for them or force them to make the right decision. We can, and must, plant the seed, water it with tears in prayer, and shield it at times from the storms that blow, but ultimately the child must decide for himself whether or not he will be a Christian.

Don't give up. Wrestle for the soul of your child in prayer. Cover him/her with faith, surround him with love, and expect God to intervene. There comes a time when we must let go of the one we love and give God the freedom to work in that life in the way He knows is best. It may look like we have given up but instead we have turned the control over to a God whose father's heart loves more than we do. Continue to build those

fences of faith and love wherever and whenever possible but release the burden of guilt and failure to a God who loves and understands parents too.

The church congregation also bears responsibility for children of the pastor. How destructive are critical words or careless comments made in their presence. Stories that sting, unfair treatment of the pastor, or impossible standards for his family make living the Christian life a negative thing for the preacher's kids.

Wise parents will not burden the child or teen with hurts or situations for which they can see no solution. Their age and experience offer no buffer. They can see no way out.

In my opinion, it is better to leave a church and move to a new location than to knowingly allow a child to be lost during his/her critical, formative years because of an ugly, destructive situation.

We only have one chance to raise our children. Never again will they pass this way: a toddler, a student, a teenager. There will be other churches, other ministries, other places, but no other "Debbie," no other "Denise," no other "David" living in my home as my offspring.

What I have given them stands. My mistakes can be forgiven but never changed. How thankful I am that God can heal their hurts, minister to their deepest longing, and make up the difference where we have failed. He is the answer to their lives just as He is to mine.

OUR INFLUENCE CONTINUES ON

Just a word about grandchildren: those precious, exceptional human beings that come to steal our hearts and heal our wounds and give us new hope for the future. The seeds we have planted in our own children's lives reproduce themselves in these little ones. One of the best parts of life is watching our children carry on the home life and spiritual values that we have

taught them. Truly God's blessing for the righteous is the love He shows to our children (Exodus 20:6).

How keenly we should feel our responsibility to pray for each of our offspring. The influence of godly grandparents is profound. Their love overlooks faults and sees dynamic potential in each new life.

Chapter Four

LIVING AT PEACE WITH YOUR PARISHIONERS

Philippians 4:7: "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

EARNING THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD

In each new place, be it a church or other ministry, it takes time to earn the right to be heard. It is natural for parishioners to compare a new pastoral family with what they have known in the past and to expect the performance of certain duties that typically belong to a pastor's wife. However, given time, very few church people refuse to allow for the individuality of the pastor's wife, or continue to make unreasonable demands of her. Her part is to go slow and put forth whatever effort it takes to understand where the people of the parish are coming from.

Ethnic and cultural backgrounds vary from church to church and from home to home. It takes time to understand a community and the thinking of its people, and it takes time for them to know their pastor's wife. It is not necessary to allow the people of the church to press her into their mold until she acts like them, eats like them, and talks like them, but it is important that she be flexible and willing to compromise life-styles in areas that might be offensive or abrasive to the locale. This could involve such everyday issues as how a dinner is served, where she sits in church, or the kind of clothes she wears. It is the "little foxes that ruin the vineyard" (Song of Solomon 2:15), and it is these seemingly insignificant issues that sometimes cause the most trouble.

The pastor's wife can save herself, her husband, and the church a lot of pain if she will listen more than she talks, gives more

than she takes, and is willing to fit in with rather than change the people she works with.

GIVERS-TAKERS

It is easy to fall into the trap of *taking* from God's people, using them, or feeling that they owe it to us because we are ministers of the gospel. While I am aware that "those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:14)--in other words, find their support from it--I am also conscious that greed and ministering for selfish gain are forbidden in the Word of God (1 Peter 5:2).

Certainly we should expect that an established church will provide for the needs of its pastors so they are able to live on a level with the average family in the church. However, I do not believe we should expect to have finer homes, better cars, nicer clothes, and more, more, more than anyone else in the community of believers. We are called to serve and to give, not to get.

Often people will bless us with extras because we have blessed them when they had a need, but never should we ask for or anticipate gifts or "freebies" from our people. When an electrician or plumber offers to help with some project in our home (not a church-owned parsonage), we should offer and expect to pay a fair amount. People that are used for the pastor's personal gain eventually catch on as they compare notes with others. When they feel they are being taken advantage of, they quickly retreat from a place of involvement and blame the church.

Learn to be thankful for what the church provides. Refrain from expressing discontent with your husband's salary or with the home you live in. Do the best you can with what comes in to live within your income by setting a realistic budget and staying within it.

In some situations it will be possible for you to earn a little extra on the side for your personal needs; but when that is not possible, God has a way of making up the difference for His faithful servants. Pay your tithes faithfully and allow God to set your standard of living where He knows is best for you at this stage of life.

CREATING THE RIGHT ATMOSPHERE

Whether she has a public, up front ministry of speaking, singing, playing an instrument, or teaching, or not, I believe the most important contribution a pastor's wife makes to the church is in her attitude. How quickly a bitter or critical spirit is detected--and caught.

By the same token, a spirit of acceptance and love will quickly spread throughout the body. A joyous spirit, a quick smile, a soft word will be reflected by the women who observe you. Your attitude toward marriage and toward your husband will, in time, become the standard they aspire to. Now that's a challenge, but true. In fact, after 4 or 5 years in a pastorate, the congregation really begins to reflect the very spirit of its leaders (Luke 6:40).

A happy-go-lucky leader begets happy-go-lucky people. A serious, studious, reflective leader will raise people with the same values. A praying, compassionate leader will also have a praying, compassionate people. That is why each church seems to have a personality of its own and draws people that are comfortable within that personality. Not everyone can handle the loud and flamboyant, but neither is everyone content with the gentle, soft-spoken pastoral couple. One is not wrong and the other right--just different.

As the pastor's wife I can help create the desired atmosphere in our church. I do it as I enter into worship. I do it as I reach out to newcomers. I do it as I submit to the choir leader or faithfully attend a layman's Sunday school class. I do it as I

cheerfully pick up the dirty dishes or plant flowers along the walk. Even when I am not aware of it, I am setting the stage for the kind of church we will become.

FRIENDSHIPS

Perhaps one of the more difficult areas we deal with as pastors' wives is that of loneliness. Many of the questions asked in ministry wives' seminars have to do with the lack of friendships a pastor's wife seems able to pursue. There are many days and evenings spent alone while husbands care for the church. Committee and board meetings, district or sectional responsibilities, counseling sessions--all get their share of his hours and strength.

Loneliness is not always a problem if the children are young and she is very busy in the church or working outside the home, but sooner or later every gal wishes there could be a special friend who understood her and accepted her in her unique position and relationship to the pastor.

She can never really forget who she is. Her assignment is not one that begins at 9 a.m. and ends at 5. She **is** the pastor's wife, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. She cannot take off the proverbial hat and get out of town when she is tired of the job, for the calling follows her. She is set apart--never just one of the girls. The sooner she realizes and accepts that, the sooner she finds fulfillment and joy in her role. With the position comes responsibility. She must try to see the overview, keep the goals in focus, and help move the people she touches closer to God.

That means the pastor's wife cannot afford to sit on the sidelines at a social function, sip tea, and discuss the shortcomings of the program. She must not wander away from the group to chit-chat with a special person or two whom she enjoys being with. Instead, she will be aware of the one who stands alone, the one who is needing help, the individual who is not yet plugged in. She will take note of the overworked leader or the lagging

schedule and assist if needed. She dare not isolate herself from the needs around her. That's leadership and that's the role of the pastor's wife.

If this standard appears to be too demanding, please know that the personal needs for friendships for the pastor's wife can be met in some unique, but satisfying ways.

One pastor's wife told how she has *special friends for various activities*--a shopping friend, a travel companion, a mommy-let's-let-the-kids-play friend, a prayer friend, and a discuss-the-issues friend. In other words, no one person is involved in every part of her life. Sometimes these individuals are found outside the church walls, perhaps in another local church, in our own neighborhood, in our children's schools, or even in political arenas or community activities.

Some insist the only friends we can have are *other pastors' wives or wives of staff members*. Some of our best friends fit in these categories, but schedule and distance are very real deterrents for a good friendship with another pastor's wife. Time and effort must be given to build and keep these wonderful friendships. Sometimes, serving on a district or sectional committee creates occasions to be together. Phone calls and brunch or luncheon times can be fit in if we make it a priority. *Staff members' wives* are great blessings and we can love and enjoy them on a closer, less demanding arrangement. However, age and interests can be far apart. Also, it is difficult to build close ties with each other when our husbands are dealing with differences between them or pressures of the ministry.

Family members, nearby or at a distance can provide ongoing relationships that span the years. My lovely, adult *daughters* are a wonderful source of friendship for me. They love me and understand our home and life-style. They are often available to fill an evening with light, interesting conversation, and of course

the little ones bring unending joy. I am also blessed with two *sisters* who are married to ministers as well. Even though we are hundreds of miles apart, there is a special place in my life that only they can fill.

We can be a friend to *many women* if we will learn to chit-chat. Allow the conversation to move, change topics, and dwell on the interests of the other person. It is refreshing to talk with women who attend our Bible studies or services, just to be a part of their daily lives. It satisfies the need for female companionship to discuss such everyday topics as hairstyles, bargains, etc. Every woman needs those times. We call it fellowship. Two fellows in the same ship, fighting the same storms, seeing the same scenery.

It is a *unique, special person* who can be a close friend to the pastor's wife, sharing in her joys and disappointments, and not be hurt or discouraged by all she sees. Some women are frustrated by the total commitment demanded by the ministry and experience anger at the people who bring pressure to the friend she cares about. Others find it difficult to listen to the pastor once she becomes a part of his personal life through his family. Many a good friend has turned out to be the other woman when marital problems arise. She's there and she knows too much.

Somewhere down the road an issue within the church can become a barrier to the friendship that exists between pastor's wife and layperson within the local body. Only a mature, well-adjusted, Christian person can go through times of disagreement on issues without harboring personal feelings or grudges against those involved.

What a precious, rare gift it is to have a long-term, caring friendship with someone who knows how to give and take in the relationship. Someone who knows balance: available but not crowding, caring but not controlling, interested but not

inquisitive, trustworthy but still an active part of the body. That could be called a best friend and she is not easy to find.

THE BEST FRIENDS

Intimate sharing with *a faithful husband* is the best kind of friendship on this earth. Over the years trust bonds are built and nurtured; backgrounds, likes, and dislikes understood; and values and desires meld into one. No one else is there when the door is closed and the lights are out. No one else goes with me into parenthood, sickness, or changes in person and place. He is there. I need him and he needs me. No other relationship deserves or demands such understanding or commitment. No other person, friend or foe, should be allowed to come between us or cause damage to our friendship. It takes time, effort, and consistency but the reward is great now and through the years.

When all is said and done regarding friendship, *only Jesus* can be a friend at all times. Only He can truly understand and minister to our deepest longings and need for intimacy. Only He never turns away from me or withholds love when I am ugly or wanting to quit. Friends have disagreements, husbands get busy and neglect us, children separate to pursue their own interests but Jesus remains true, ever present, ever ready to help us and love us. He is my dearest friend.

BEST FRIEND

*I was there as you awoke,
A little late--
but there was enough time for me
so I called your name.
But your radio was loud and you were singing along,
and you didn't hear.*

*I was there in first period
as you endured an exam.
I observed in pain as you cried quietly,
admitting failure.
I cried with you. Together we wouldn't have failed,
But you ignored my tears.*

*I was there in the corridor
as you were asked out on a date.
I noticed as your face lit up in pleasure.
But I knew,
So I gently chided, understanding the pain he would bring,
but you denied my wisdom and love.*

*I was there at field hockey tryouts
as you scored the winning goal.
You turned to receive applause for your victory
but your teammates were running up the field.
I tapped you on the shoulder, I wanted you to tell me,
but you shrugged off my touch.*

*I was there as you drifted off to sleep,
moonlight on your face.
I wanted to awaken you to talk,
but I didn't.
I cried alone that night. You had turned your back on me,
but you slept on, uncaring.*

*And all this time
you had said that I was
your Best Friend!*

By: Granddaughter, Melissa N. Kerr, 15 years old

Chapter Five

LIVING AT PEACE WITH YOUR PLACE

Isaiah 32:18: "My people will live in peaceful dwelling places, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest."

The questions of who? what? when? and where? must be answered in regard to a place of ministry. Whom will we work with? In what phase of ministry will we serve? When should we begin? Where will we live and work?

Since we are addressing the ministry of the pastor's wife, not that of the pastor, we need to recognize that these decisions will belong primarily to him. If he is the one answering God's call on His life, a wife must allow the Holy Spirit to speak to him and clarify the *place* of ministry. Hopefully, however, this will be a shared vision. It helps tremendously to live at peace with your place if she has had personal confirmation that it is God's place for her as well as for her husband. The minister who allows his wife to share in the choice and even waits, if necessary, for God to confirm it to her heart is demonstrating wisdom and true love for her and for his family. He will reap the benefit of peace at home.

THOSE EARLY YEARS

Training is ongoing and finding the work for which we are bestsuited or to which we are called can take many months or even several years of experimenting with various ministries. Granted, some people seem to know from the beginning that they are called to go to New York City or China and exactly what their work will be there. However, most of us begin to serve in a local church, and from there we feel our way towards the place of our calling. God has a way of providing

experiences or exposing us to people who influence the direction we will eventually take.

The community we choose to work in is often one with similar standards of living and moral values to what we grew up with. Individuals who grew up in the inner-city, love its bustle and noise, and relate to mass transit systems and walk-up apartments, frequently find a growing desire to return to that society and to minister to the ills and needs with which they are familiar. A person who has always lived in suburban America knows that lovely homes and manicured lawns do not necessarily mean that peace reigns behind the doors, and so there comes a burden to minister to that group of people. When God burdens a heart for ministry to people in a culture that is unfamiliar to the worker, He equips accordingly and provides the skills and "everything good for doing His will" (Hebrews 13:21).

In choosing a place of ministry, we often have to go in the direction that opens to us even though it may appear to be a stepping-stone to the real call on our hearts. These places can be considered a part of the training process, but at the same time our goal must be to serve, not to be served. City or suburb, the needs, though wearing different faces, are much the same...hurting, lonely, lost people. People needing a Savior and people for whom Jesus died. For the one who is willing to go, there **is** a place for ministry.

HINDRANCES TO FINDING A PLACE

Financial Obligations

Years of schooling, medical bills, or over-extended purchases can be a real problem since having a degree or even a PhD or several years of experience do not guarantee a living wage in the ministry. Perhaps it should be different but, the fact is we may need to begin at the bottom of the wage scale in order to establish a new church, revive an old one, or reach into a needy

area. How wonderful it is when we enter the ministry debt-free and keep our lives free from financial entanglements.

It may be necessary for husband or wife, or both, to work in secular employment for a time. There is no disgrace in that. Paul did it (1 Corinthians 4:12) and seemed to be proud of it (2 Thessalonians 3:8). He did not see it as a lack of faith. Working within the community in which you pastor can provide opportunity for expanding the influence of the church. You can get an insider's view of the culture and mind-set of the people and build a good rapport with them by being involved in some business or profession outside the church. On the other hand, Jesus taught that the "worker deserves his wages" (Luke 10:7), and certainly the time should come when the pastor's salary is adequate to provide for the personal needs of his family.

A wife's place in all of this is so important. We can be hurt and feel our husband is unjustly treated by a less-than-adequate salary. We may have to help carry the financial load by working part-time (or more) outside the home and church, causing a feeling of separation from the work of the Lord or anger at our mate for the pressures brought by the employment situation. One solution may be for a husband and wife to each work part-time or even job-share a position so that church work will be more evenly shared.

As pastors' wives, we set the standard of living for our home. If our demands are high, we may pressure our husbands to work extra hours outside of the ministry to keep us happy with all the **things** we feel are important. A first-time salary may look like it will go farther than it will in actual living. We must be careful not to obligate ourselves to charge accounts and purchases that will create pressure in the future.

Once we walk through an open door of ministry we often find ourselves very much on our own financially. At least in our denomination, there are no great sugar-daddies waiting to provide for our needs. Most districts do not have adequate

financial programs in place to supplement the living costs of all who would desire it. Nor do most staff or pastoral positions offer full support and benefits from year #1.

Some couples have never worked with a budget and just spend as the dollars come. If they have it, they spend it. If there is no money, there is no food, fuel, or gasoline. Ron and Judy Blue have written some excellent books on financial management including *The Debt Squeeze*, *Master Your Money*, *Raising Money Smart Kids*, and *A Woman's Guide to Financial Peace of Mind*⁴. One point emphasized in their books is the often ignored fact that a person must spend less than he earns. Simple. Right? Wrong. If money cannot be found to save for a car or new furniture ahead of time, it may not be found to make the payments after purchase.

The fact is that ministry of any kind demands hard work and patience. Material goods and prestige are not always there immediately. They must be earned over years of consistent hard work. In most cases, the day will come when financial pressures will ease but, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Christian ministry does not negate that truth and God's work is offended by individuals who look for freerides and handouts all along the way. What a poor testimony for the world to see. God often provides for His people by giving them the wisdom and strength to work.

Attitudes/Relationships

Demanding, self-centered, or unkind attitudes can be deterrents to finding a place of ministry. We are in the people business, and the relationships we develop reveal what kind of ministry we will build. Ministry is service. Servanthood must be practiced even during the years of study and preparation for

⁴ Ron and Judy Blue, *A Woman's Guide to Financial Peace of Mind* (Focus on the Family, Pomona, CA, 1991).

ministry. Being willing to serve in a local church or outreach ministry during Bible school and seminary days builds a gridwork of confidence and support for the future. Often the people we meet and serve there are the very ones God will use to open doors for us in the future.

Yes, God uses people. We will need someone to help us get started and to open doors for us along the way....someone for whom we have worked and to whom we have proven ourselves. Call it *politics* if you will, but Timothy needed Paul and John Mark needed Barnabas to help open doors for them.

Some sort of track record of faithfulness, good attitudes, and a willingness to serve must be laid before we have the credibility to claim the title of pastor or church staff person.

At least 1 to 2 years are necessary in a place before a person is able to really contribute in a worthwhile, effective way. Time is needed to know and be known, to build trust, and to work out personal gifts and calling. More positions are lost (secularly or ministerially) through wrong attitudes and poor relationships than through lack of ability or skill. Skills can be learned over time, but attitudes can only be changed by the person with God's help.

CHANGING PLACES

A change of ministry and moves from one place to another are usually more difficult for the wife and children. A recent workshop leader in the Boston area told his class that the average length of stay for a pastor in evangelistic churches is 2½ years. That speaks of a lot of uprooting and changing for the pastoral families of our nation. Leaving behind everything that is familiar and comfortable, faces and places that speak of security and happy memories, can be devastating. Frequent moves cause a person to resist putting down permanent roots or bonding with friends.

Consideration for each member of the family is crucial at this time. Can children finish the school year or complete achievements they have been working for? Will the move affect the family financial picture adversely? Would a delay of a few weeks help all concerned?

Each new place requires a period of adjustment...a time to locate and set up new living quarters, find new doctors and service people, locate the best places to shop, and be accepted by people in the church and community. Even after years of ministry, a new place is like starting over in many respects. Once again we must earn the right to be heard. We must prove our worth and win the approval of those we will serve. It may be a year or even two before we as pastors' wives find that niche again...our comfort zone.

Nothing stays the same forever. Just as clothing becomes worn, dated, and too small, so the *place* in which we serve will change. A pastorate is not forever. Joyous celebrations and exciting events pass quickly. Heartache and trials do not last either. The only really certain thing in life is that it will change. At some point in time we will face the fact that our days as a pastor's wife have come to an end. It may be brought about by a new opportunity for ministry, by a change in health of wife or spouse, by retirement, or even by death, but that day will come. We need to prepare for it.

Be patient. Be thankful. Having a place of ministry is precious and to be treasured. Yes, we sometimes make mistakes in choosing a place, but God can and will use any place to help us grow and to prepare us for fulfilling His divine will.

MAKING YOUR PLACE A HOME

In recent years we have had graphic illustrations of the offense high-living can bring to the gospel message. However, neither is the message justly served by ministers who live in poverty or

whose homes reflect carelessness and neglect. Our homes can and must look neat, clean and cared for.

With a little creativity and in some cases a lot of elbow grease, any place can be made into a real home. However, we must assume that it is our responsibility to make it that regardless of who actually holds title to the property. No landlord and no church committee or board is able to really know your likes and dislikes or your personal needs. Therefore, as wives and home managers, we must take the initiative to make our living place a home. If the home is owned by the church, major changes will have to be cleared with the board, as well as any expenses that you expect them to pay for. Usually a simple letter of request taken to the board meeting by the pastor will suffice if we are not demanding more than they are able to provide.

We have lived in about every kind of accommodation imaginable within suburban America. Everything from an upstairs, 3-room apartment (our first home), a 32 foot mobile home, a farm house, a 22 by 28 foot block house built with our own hands, and a pre-Civil War house which we moved to a new location to make room for a church building--to lovely split entries and ranch-style homes--14 different homes over 38 years of ministry. Many of these years were lived in church-owned properties, and we found that the churches were happy to have us take care of their property as if it were our own.

Decorate.

Are you frustrated with your living place? Start with one room.

The one you are in the most is a good place to start, or perhaps the one that other people see when they first enter the house. If you are not adept at decorating or choosing colors, look at magazines or paint and wallpaper books (the pictures are great) until you see something you like. Study the picture. What is it you like? Is it the color combination? Does it seem airy and light or cozy and heavy with knickknacks? Once you

can pinpoint what you really like, you can go to work and begin to duplicate it in your home.

It is worth waiting to purchase a good piece of furniture like a sofa or table set because you will probably have it for a long time. Visit quality furniture stores and learn about fabrics and construction. Study various styles of furniture to determine what you and your husband like and stay away from trendy looks that you will tire of in a few years. Try to coordinate styles of furniture and keep the pieces flexible so they can be used again if you move to a different type of home. In the meantime, you can work a wonderful transformation with pleasant paint colors and careful placement of what you have. Things need not be new to be good.

Keep It Clean and Neat.

Windows reflect a woman's housekeeping. Neat curtains, straight drapes, and clean windows say you care about your house. A table cleared and dishes put away help bring peace to your place. Learn to throw away: old papers and magazines, old clothes, extra dishes, or old appliances and cars. Keep the yard and doorways free from extra equipment, toys, or trash. Whether the house belongs to you or to the church, for the sake of your testimony in the community, keep things painted and repaired. Not only are people watching, but you need the peace brought about by a well-organized and clean home. For a busy pastoral couple it may be well to enlist the help of someone else in some of these areas, but the responsibility is ultimately that of the home dweller.

Children can be taught it is just as easy to put dirty clothes in a nearby hamper or in a box in their closet, as it is to throw them on the floor. Make it convenient for the family and see to it that clothes are laundered and put away regularly. A sure deterrent to peace in the parsonage is the lack of a clean shirt or socks when needed in a hurry. Laundry is one of those little duties that becomes a major priority as the family grows.

The entrance to your home should be inviting. Put something pretty there. Be sure the steps are uncluttered and swept, the door is painted (perhaps a pleasant, contrasting color), and boots and shoes are out of the way. Hang a new wreath or seasonal decoration on the door. Provide a place for the children to hang their coats and put their mittens and hats away from the guest coat area. No closet? Plenty of hooks behind the kitchen door at child-height could meet the need, and who says there can't be several higher-up ones for Mom and Dad? A box-seat or shoe rack may help. A simple shelf and attached rod, hung on the wall as you see in a motel room, in whatever length you have room for, can be a very effective means of providing for those extra coats.

ONE-MINUTE MANAGEMENT PLAN

For The Busy Pastor's Wife

KEEPING HOUSE

1. Clean up messes immediately.
2. Never put things away temporarily.
3. Make use of short periods of time to do special tasks (one window or curtain).

RAISING CHILDREN

1. Listen with both ears; recognize cries for help or loneliness.
2. Live a consistent life of devotion, sharing your goals and love with them.
3. Take frequent attitude checks: cheerful? Complaining? Content? Critical?

ACCOMPLISHING MORE

1. Choose my priorities. What do I do best and enjoy?
2. Discipline myself to do the important things first, without diversion.
3. Take care of personal physical needs: food, rest, exercise.

HELPING THE PASTOR

1. Pray for him.
2. Be loving and available.
3. Be content with what you have.

Chapter Six

LIVING AT PEACE WITH YOUR PEERS

Romans 12:18: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

One of the great joys of ministry is the fellowship we have with one another as ministers of the gospel. Even though our paths may cross only occasionally during the years, a bond is built with other pastors and their wives that is sweet and rewarding. Learning to work together in ways that benefit the Kingdom and bless one another is a challenge that deserves some careful attention.

YOUR DENOMINATIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Determine from the beginning that you will support your fellowship or denomination. Ours is described as "a cooperative fellowship based upon mutual agreements voluntarily entered into by its membership." A competitive or critical spirit of fellow ministers or churches creates a fertile ground in which Satan can work to destroy the work of God. As a pastor's wife you can demonstrate your support by attending district or sectional Women's Ministries functions as often as possible and by serving wherever you can whether it be on a planning committee, setting up for a banquet or women's retreat, helping with office procedures, or soliciting the involvement of women in your own church. Go to the district leaders and let them know you are willing to serve.

Often national, district, and sectional leaders feel very much alone in the work they are doing. A note of appreciation or a friendly phone call lets them know you are with them. Just observe how often these wives sit alone, wait for their husbands to conduct business session, or stay home with the family while

he travels from church to church, and you will recognize how much they need and enjoy the friendship of other ministry wives.

Whether or not we agree with everything done by our district officials or denomination, the unity of pastors and wives who support one another and their organization with love and understanding is one factor that will help defeat Satan's ploy against the spread of the gospel.

Pastors who get involved with district duties are often away from home and away from the local church. If we are not careful, we can resent the demands made on an already full schedule. However, a wife needs to support her husband in this role for there is something about getting away from the routine and the local burden that helps broaden his vision and makes his work at home more precious. The call is greater than one church, one town, or one district. The call is the world and a pastor is a pastor wherever he works to build up the church of Christ.

ENTERTAINING MISSIONARIES AND EVANGELISTS

In the good old days evangelists and missionaries were always kept in the pastor's home. Today, many churches are able to offer the option of a hotel and meals at restaurants. However, there are still times when the parsonage is the best choice for guests.

Evangelists can tell some horror stories that most of us find hard to believe:

- bathrooms housing cats, dogs, or other living creatures
- used, even soiled, bed linens
- tight quarters, piled high with toys, clothes, and papers
- bedrooms shared with children of the parsonage
- no food or drinks offered

Perhaps a few basic pointers will help the inexperienced hostess get ready for a guest in the home:

- Bathrooms must be scrubbed from top to bottom: tile, tub, shower, toilet, floor. These areas hold odors and germs and must be cleaned thoroughly with an antiseptic cleaner at least three times a week if used by the family. Clean towels should be provided, hung separate from the family's, and pointed out to the guests when they arrive. Fresh soap and tissues should be conveniently available.

- If there are pets in the home, they should be confined away from your guest's sleeping area. Allergies can be a problem as well as unfamiliar odors and hair or dirt left behind by the furry creatures. To an animal lover this may be hard to understand, but some people are actually afraid of a cat or dog or may find fish and birds and gerbils repulsive.

- Children are wonderful, if they are your own, and when they are sweet, clean, and quiet. But when they are rambunctious, quarreling, smelly, and are **not** yours, they can be aggravating and obnoxious. To the in-house guest who has no children of his own or who has been away from a family's growing pains for a while, it is difficult to study and pray and prepare one's heart for ministry in the same space as the preacher's kids. Do your best to separate the children from the guests' quarters and allow them space to hang their clothes and to stretch out during the day for rest. A room in the church, set up for study, can help take the pressure off the house.

- Food requirements vary greatly according to individual taste and health. It is best to provide several options for breakfast and lunch and freedom of choice regarding eating times for guests who will be in the home more than 2 or 3 days. The pastor's wife's schedule is already full and to prepare meals three times a day can be wearing on all concerned.

Most people who travel like to eat light at certain times of the day. A bowl of fresh, ripe fruit, easily accessible, toast or bagels, and beverages ready to serve can ease the load and make things pleasant for your visitors. Be sure to suggest these items and volunteer to serve them from time to time. Ask your guests when they prefer to eat a full meal. Often an early hour (4-4:30) is better than a later one if you are having nightly meetings. Some prefer to eat after church and that can be arranged with a little careful planning or by feeding the family separately during the week of special meetings.

- Give your guests the best bed in the house. Don't kill them with a pull-out sofa, small bunk beds, or a swayback roll-away. Be sure the linens are fresh and clean, the mattress covered, pillows sweet smelling. Air out the room and provide a fan or extra heater as needed.

- Respect the privacy of your visiting speakers. They are with people all the time and need time to be alone with each other and with the Lord. Staying up late every night, eating, talking, and laughing may be fun for a few days but will take its toll on all concerned as well as on the effectiveness of the services.

STAFF MEMBERS

Many of the churches in our fellowship are small, under 100 in attendance, so there are a great many ministerial couples who work alone in their respective places. More and more, however, we are coming to realize that there is strength in the team concept of leadership. In fact, one of the criteria emphasized for inner-city work is that no one couple attempt to begin a work alone. The forces of the enemy are strong, and multiple staff people praying together and sharing the same vision helps keep the workers on track.

A good relationship between staff members and between their families is vital to the ongoing of the church. Individuals in competition with each other or at odds over a matter will affect

the flow of the Spirit within the body. Criticism of dress or of a different life-style can become slander or gossip when indulged in between staff members. With all the pressures of ministry and our attempt to live up to the expectations of a congregation, how desperately we need to find acceptance with our fellow ministers and wives.

A senior pastor may feel used when a staff member wants to **take** all he can in the way of counseling time, ideas, salary, and friendships within the church, but **gives** little to the overall thrust of ministry. Sharing the challenges of marriage, parenting, housekeeping--all the things that a wife and mother struggle with--can be fun and uplifting for women who will take time to really get acquainted and to know each other outside the four walls of the church building. These may be times after the evening service, luncheon appointments, sewing bees, shopping sprees, the exchange of baby-sitting hours, or attending retreats together. If we watch for them, there are many opportunities to enjoy each other.

The responsibility of putting these times together often falls on the senior pastor's wife. Her input and willingness to share and to give, as well as to receive support, will make it happen. However, she is blessed by staff wives who help with the burden of entertaining, both financially and with preparation and cleanup tasks. Because most pastoral homes are very busy, casual times, or even spontaneous times of fellowship, often help fill the gap for needed companionship...times when everyone can relax, church problems are not discussed, but personal and family interests are addressed. This is a good time to discuss such subjects as signs of burnout, ways to improve family relationships, danger signs of infidelity, etc. Personal sharing is much easier with a hot cup of tea in hand and a fire burning in the fireplace or sitting on soft grass in the shade of a big tree than in the office or in a public place.

FORMER PASTORATES

Little has been written about the ethical practices of the ministry.

Some aspects are simply a matter of good taste or sensitivity to people. Others are a matter of tradition or acceptable policies that bring peace or understanding to the body.

One area that is difficult to explain to the average layperson in a church is the separation required by the former pastor of a congregation from people he has loved and served for many years. Their lives have become intertwined with his, as he and his wife have counseled and shared with individuals during times of heartache and joy. Suddenly, upon leaving, the pastor is no longer available and the loss is felt very deeply. It appears that he does not really care and that they are forgotten and replaced by other people or other interests.

As difficult as leaving is for parish and pastor, a pastor and his wife do the congregation a favor when they break close ties with members of the congregation. It takes time for a new pastor to gain the love and acceptance of the people, to know their families, and to understand and relate to their needs. He will want to try new ideas and new programs and will make changes that may or may not be received by every member. As long as a congregation has access to their former ministering couple, can bring their problems to them or share their grievances with them, they will delay the bonding process with new leaders.

Certainly notes of appreciation and thanks are in order during the first months of separation as people of the congregation reach out in love to the former pastor and his wife. In time, spiritually healthy people will make the transfer of respect and support of a new minister. It is the responsibility of the pastors, new and old, to help bring about this healing process. A new pastor can help by being supportive of the former pastoral couple, even bringing them home on occasion so that people

are assured of their well-being. Those who love one leader are capable of passing this love on to another.

The same ethics are required of visiting evangelists, missionaries, or other ministering groups. It is unhealthy to form spiritually dependent relationships within someone else's congregation and to nurture that relationship with private visits, phone calls, and personal letters. It is just too easy to become the catalyst for division or misunderstanding. Our goal in ministry is to bring the gospel of peace.

Chapter Seven

LIVING AT PEACE WITH YOUR GOD

Hebrews 13:20 & 21: "May the God of peace...equip you with everything good for doing his will..."

Before, during, and after life in the parsonage, a personal relationship with God is the one thing that will carry us through. Before Moses could lead the people "out of the camp to meet with God," he "went up to God" himself (Exodus 19).

Our spirituality is often measured by how many invitations we get to speak, counsel, or participate in district events. Success in the ministry may be equated with great programs and large attendance. Could it be that God's idea of spirituality and success are something different? Moses led over a million people for more than 40 years. Jesus spent only 3½ years in public ministry and most of his energy, time, and teaching was directed toward 12 men in a small corner of the world. Which man was most successful in God's opinion?

Before community, before church, before family, before husband, and before personal needs comes the necessity of building a personal experience with our Creator. God looks on the heart. Being a Christian person, a child of God, is a process of *becoming*. What goes on inside a person, in the privacy of his own heart and mind, and in the lonely, dark hours of the night is what determines daylight activity and attitudes. A yielded, willing spirit will seek to serve. A humble, yielded heart will set priorities that give God time to work out His will and His way. What goes on the inside supplies the life and energy for the demands of life.

We hear it, we teach it, but do we *do* it? Daily time with the Lord, in prayer and in His Word, is the means God has provided for keeping us through every difficulty. We will not be able to control everything around us. We will experience disappointment, hurt, and rejection, but we *can* survive it all with joy if we build the inner person strong in trust and hope. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

DETERMINE TO MEET WITH THE LORD:

Daily: Talk to Him before the burdens of the day absorb your energy and fill your mind with their demands. For wives, this often means praying before our feet touch the floor, before the family knows we are awake. During children's naptimes or after their bedtime at night may be the only available moments for reading the Word. Sometimes a chapter before or after dinner can bless the whole family but nothing can take the place of those alone times with God.

Weekly: If your daily times for devotions are brief, try to schedule 1 or 2 days when you can have a longer period of time in His Presence and in the Word. Zero in on family and personal needs and then expand your thoughts and prayers to include needy individuals in the church, district leaders, country, and the world.

Bimonthly: Set aside a special day or two, when nothing is scheduled except renewal of the peace of God within. "Seek peace and pursue it" (Psalm 34:14) or the pressures of life will rob you of it. Peace is not automatic, nor is it always found in the parsonage. It must be pursued. Take time to clarify your purpose, your vision, and to hear from God. There is no other way to avoid burnout or to cope with the myriad of challenges that come in the course of being the wife of a minister.

Family Devotions: Let there be natural times of conversation and sharing of spiritual values. Let your children hear you

repentant and humble before God, bringing family needs, asking for personal help, and earnestly praying for others.

PRACTICE THE PRESENCE OF GOD

"Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (Proverbs 4:23)--refreshing, satisfying, fulfilling.

Keep a thankful heart. "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise..." (Psalm 100:4). First thing in the morning, think of all that is **right** in your life...all the blessings you enjoy. Verbalize thanks to God and to your family. Depression has a difficult time dwelling in the home of the thankful.

Practice a humble heart. Be quick to confess your faults to God and allow Him to exalt you in His own time (James 4:10). Humbly release to your Savior all criticism as well as accolades that you receive throughout the day. Be willing to learn from others and to show appreciation to them.

Encourage a willing heart. A heart that says yes to God is willing to serve anywhere, doing even the most menial task in His name. "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might..." (Ecclesiastes 9:10). Be willing to love the unlovely and to radiate Christ in the darkest corners.

Persist with a praying heart. Pray when hurt, fearful, or angry. Pray on schedule and spontaneously. "Pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Jesus is always there to help carry the burden of the day.

Keep a restful heart. Work at keeping peace in the home, in the church, and with your God. "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels" (2 Timothy 2:23). Forgive quickly. Don't brood over mistakes or situations that you cannot change; confess them and go on.

Maintain a growing heart. Don't be satisfied to let your husband, the pastor, do all the learning. Keep your mind alert and your spirit growing by reading and studying. Attend classes or seminars that challenge and motivate (2 Timothy 2:15).

Preserve a pure heart. Don't allow sin to gain a foothold in any area of your life. Turn away quickly from temptation and resist evil influences in your home (James 4:7). "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

"O, God, help us to experience *your* peace in the parsonage."

MY HOPE

*A vision of loveliness flows from above
A vision of mercy, hope, joy, and love.
The ache in my heart takes wing like a bird
As the voices of angels within me are heard.*

*New hope for tomorrow begins to take hold,
As I lift my glad eyes to glories untold.
It's a vision of Jesus, the Savior of men,
Come to redeem, to release me from sin.*

*The guilt of the past with all of its pain
Takes flight as I see Him and hear Him again.
Oh the joy of glad hope, born deep within
Through the voice of my Savior...
My hope is in Him!*

-J.M.