

5 Keys for Women to Survive the Ministry

“A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband, but she who brings shame is as rottenness in his bones” (Prov. 12:4).

I have been in the ministry alongside of my husband for 45 years. I will readily admit that when I first answered the call to ministry, I was very idealistic. I actually heard the call of God on my life before I met my husband at age 16.

If I were to give advice to wives in the ministry I would say:

1. Discover your own calling from God.
2. Be yourself.
3. Be supportive of your husband in every possible way.
4. Keep focused on your blessings.
5. Learn the keys to forgiveness.

Since I can't write about all of these topics in one session, I will be biblical and let the last be first.

I thought being a pastor's wife would be like living in heaven, serving the saints and performing saintly duties. I wanted to help people turn to God and find healing and wholeness. I was sure that all I would reach out to would appreciate my intervention and benefit from my sage advice.

I just knew that being married to a pastor must be like being married to God.

When I met the man I would marry, I knew he was not perfect, but somehow I knew that as a team we would overcome every obstacle that life would put in our way.

I was right about that, but I had no idea how difficult some of those obstacles would prove to be.

I became a pastor's wife at age 19. I am a small-built, petite woman and really looked only 16. It was embarrassing many times to be mistaken for one of the teenagers in our congregation instead of the "revered" pastor's wife. I delved into my role with all the resolve of an idealistic young person and was met with amusement and at times irritation.

It was not all I thought it would be. Some of the people in our congregations were stubborn and opinionated, and a few were downright ornery.

Living with a pastor was also not quite what I had envisioned.

He was at times overwhelmed with his work and driven by a passion that would often leave me and the children we soon had behind. He had what many would call an apostolic ministry, which meant that we were always moving.

I was a person who loved roots and long friendships. I soon became wounded and disillusioned by the very calling I felt God had put upon my life. I think all pastor's wives have found themselves in exactly the place I am describing. I had one true blessing in my life that I believe helped me find a place of peace.

I knew that God had called me to ministry, and I was willing to hear His perspective on the disappointments that I had faced.

Early in my discipleship, I was taught to expect persecution and trouble. I just never thought it would come from the church.

Through the years, as I was willing to listen (and I admit I was not always willing) God taught me many things that have given me strength and brought me to a place of peace.

Forgiveness is difficult because it involves emotion and action. The action of saying "I forgive you" is not as difficult as making the words a reality in your heart.

I was wounded many times by people to whom we had reached out and sacrificed our own finances and comfort to help. People to whom I had shared my heart had betrayed me, and people who had promised they would be there for us had disappointed us.

I came to recognize there was really no one that could be counted upon to be there when we needed them, no one, that is, except God. People are fallible and so can be counted upon to fail us. I was no different.

One particularly painful day after experiencing one of my earliest rejections, I was struggling with this concept of forgiveness, so I called out to God. I knew that I was supposed to forgive, and I wanted to do that, but I just could not get my emotions to line up. "God, how do I forgive?" I asked. God did not answer me by giving me a magic Scripture verse or series of words to say, but through the years, He showed me the meaning of this most powerful act.

At one church, we had a group rise up against us and split the church. Church splits are as old as the church itself. They will be with us everywhere we find people who would rather be right than reconcile. In the process, of course, many people get hurt. Many forget that the pastor and his wife are usually hurt the most.

This time, one of the people who decided to leave was a very dear person to our children. I knew that we needed to let them know what was going on before they heard it from another source.

We tried to be very careful to tell the truth without making the people who were causing this disturbance into monsters in our children's eyes. Later that day, my oldest child came to me and said these words: "I have made a decision today. I am

not going to remember that person by this one unkind action but I am going to remember her by all the good times we had together.”

That day, I knew I had been given one of the main keys to forgiveness by my own little girl.

If we were to put the actions of the people we serve into percentages, we would most likely find that the hurtful actions are a very small slice of the pie. Our problem is that pain gets our attention more readily than pleasure.

Paper cuts, though very small and insignificant, hurt a great deal. When we focus our attention on the paper cuts that others inflict upon us, we are not able to focus on what is good. I will admit that not all the hurts inflicted on us are paper cuts, but the principle still applies.

Another time when I had been deeply wounded by a congregation of people was just at the time that the movie *The Passion of Christ* was being shown.

As I watched the part where Jesus was being praised by the people as He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and then within just one week’s time watched as those same people turned viciously on Him, demanding His death, I could actually feel the pain of betrayal that He must have also felt at that time.

Experiencing pain in the ministry gives us a rare privilege of identifying with the sufferings of Christ.

Once we have experienced that for a reality our relationship with Him deepens to a new level of intimacy.

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