

Why You May Not Want to Marry a Preacher

“Do not be unequally yoked...” 2 Corinthians 6:14 (a reference to Deuteronomy 22:10 where Israel is told not to plow with a team composed of an ox and a donkey).

We all agree that Scripture teaches believers should not marry unbelievers.

But, would it be an unequal yoke for one called into the ministry to be wed to a Christian who resents her spouse's ministerial calling and resists the demands that this life has?

Surely we can agree that not everyone should marry a preacher.

(The obligatory disclaimer: In our denomination, preachers are men. I know some women pastors in other denominations and respect them very much. But I know nothing of the pressures they face. Thus, for me to write for their situation would be highly presumptuous. Please do not write accusing me of sexism or prejudice against women. Thank you.)

When I began this list a few days ago, mostly I intended it as a light-hearted piece since I'm a preacher and love pastors and their families. Any woman who marries a called servant of the Lord should feel special to Him, I'm thinking, and she needs to know what she's getting into. And then, I decided to ask for help.

I invited Facebook friends to suggest reasons why someone “might not want to marry a preacher.” I expected soft answers. Oh my, the responses.

But first, here is my original list:

1. A preacher lives with his work 24/7/365. Even on his off

days and vacations, his mind is always on his work. *If you want to be married to a husband who works 8 to 5, this man is not the one for you.*

2. A preacher wakes up at night and gets out of bed to look things up and write down ideas. His getting up and coming back to bed will disturb you. This is normal. *If you would resent such interruptions, do yourself and him a favor and say 'no' if he proposes.*

3. Preachers live by faith, as depicted in Hebrews 11. They will sometimes do the strangest of things for the flimsiest of reasons and the only explanation they can give is "I felt the Lord wanted me to do this." *If you want a man who is never a mystery, keep looking.*

4. Preachers live for others. *If you want a husband who is devoted only to you, choose another husband.*

5. Preachers do not live as well materially as others, for several reasons. One, the profession is not one of the higher paying careers. Two, they give a tithe and more to their church. Three, they are generous in every other area of their lives. And four, even if money is plentiful, they would not want to live lavishly and set a bad example. *If you want to live in a mansion and have servants, choose another husband (and good luck with that!).*

Soon, the comments from Facebook friends began pouring in. To my surprise, most were as serious as a heart attack. According to several, young women not only "may" not want to marry a preacher but would be crazy to do so.

So much hurt and anger came spilling out. These ministry wives were quick to say:

- "The preacher is never at home."
- "You are the last of his priorities. Everyone comes before you and the kids."

- “The church boards are cruel and selfish and demanding.”
- “A pastor’s wife is never allowed to have friends. I’m so lonely.”
- “I have wished a thousand times I’d never married a preacher.”
- “The pay is insulting, the benefits imaginary, and the support from the churches undependable.”

Yikes. What is this, I wondered. So much hurt, so much pain.

I was surprised that very few wives of ministers countered these statements with their own testimonies, saying how wonderful a life it is, how the rewards outweigh the burdens and stresses, how special a pastor’s wife should feel.

Their silence ought to tell us something.

The bottom line for all this ... do not marry a preacher if ...

1. You do not feel a similar call from God on your life.

Otherwise, your expectations will be directed toward your husband and you will be eternally frustrated. Someone asks, “Where in the Bible do you find God calling ministers’ wives?” Answer: Nowhere. It’s just basic common sense, I think. You don’t find Him calling artists or agriculture specialists or communication consultants, but every mission field has people with gifts in these areas who can testify of God’s call upon them.

2. You are not a person of prayer. Only the strength of the Lord is going to protect you and empower your service. Abide in Him always. “It is necessary always to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). Of all Scriptures, the verse which seems to fit pastors’ wives is 2 Corinthians 3:5, “Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.”

3. You think a husband should be home every night for dinner and put you and the children first in his life. (This is about

you and your expectations. We can hope the pastor/husband/daddy will get this right, but if you demand it, it's all downhill from then on.)

My observation is there will often be tension between where a pastor wants to be this evening and where he should be. No one can tell him what to do. Pray for God to give him two things: great wisdom and an understanding wife.

4. You do not love the people of the Lord. Nothing helps us to treasure the Lord's people more than a great love for Him and a healthy understanding of our own sinful, needy natures. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30) should be the mantra for all of us. If, however, my love for Him is a sometimes thing and my life revolves around me and my needs, this life is going to be a nightmare.

5. You expect church people to always act like Christians. We all—every church leader!—do well to lower the expectations we put upon others. Remember these people are "but dust" (Psalm 103:14). Most will get this right, but some church members can be childish, demanding, mean-spirited, and as carnal as anyone in the worst tavern in town. Do not be blindsided by their misbehavior. Stay prayed up.

6. You cannot live with people scrutinizing everything you do, from how you raise your children to the way you wear your hair. You must be able to ignore it or laugh it off. One lady used to tease me relentlessly about the suits I wore. These days, she would be amazed how few preachers wear suits!

I will promise you one thing, wife of a minister: From your home, you will see the worst side of the best people (God's children). But determine that you will love them anyway, and God will use you in amazing ways.

7. Finally, do not marry a preacher if you expect your rewards down here on earth. The great payoff for servants of God comes not in recognitions and bank accounts down here but in the

promises of God for a later time. “You shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14).

If that sounds like so much smoke blowing, please do the minister a favor and say ‘no’ when he proposes to you. Do not saddle him with the burden of a spouse who is forever unhappy at his life-calling.

So, marry the man—if he asks and you and your folks agree this is “of God.” I will tell you this from personal experience:

- There are 10,000 rewards to serving the Lord as a pastor and wife.
- There are indeed a thousand headaches and stresses. But these come in every career. It’s called life. The minister’s home will have its share but so does every other residence up and down the street.
- Nothing helps you stay focused on keeping close to the Lord like knowing you have to teach that class Sunday morning (or preach that sermon) and need to stay on your knees and in the Word to do it well.
- God has a few sweet godly saints in every church who will love you and pray for you and will compensate for the ogres. Ask Him to show you who they are. Then, pull them close to you.

If God calls you to marry a minister, I pray He leads you to the right one, and that you will have—as Margaret and I did before the Lord took her to Heaven last January—52 years of service to Him, and a lifetime of satisfaction in knowing you made a lasting difference in people’s lives. {eo}

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