

# **CHALLENGES IN THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR'S WIFE AND HOW THAT AFFECTS THE PASTORAL MARRIAGE**

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## **THREE BASIC MODELS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE MARRIAGE**

There are three basic ways that pastor's wives can look at themselves and a woman may shift from one of these to another over time, though her basic stance is usually one of these.

### **A. WIFE OF THE PASTOR**

In this way of functioning the pastor and wife see her role as his wife, no more and no less. Her relationship with the church is the same as the relationship of any woman with her husband's work. She supports, encourages, gives honest feedback. She does this because they've chosen to be life partners, not because her husband is a pastor. She will often feel more freedom to do what she wants than in the other roles. If her husband changed to another kind of work, it would not significantly affect what she does or her sense of self (how she sees herself).

This way of looking at the wife's role is the easiest on the marital functioning because it is clearest. This does not guarantee healthy functioning, but removes the built-in blocks of some of the other perceptions of the wife's role.

### **B. MINISTRY PARTNER**

In this role, the pastor and wife both view her as a ministry partner and so does the congregation. She may or may not have an official title or office, but her role as "co" is clear.

This role requires a very mature mlenge will come!! Let that bring you together to talk and to remind one another of the Presence, Power and Guidance of our Father God.

The marriage where competition has been melted away by a foundation of trust and deep respect..

This is probably the rarest of the three ways of functioning.

## **C-. PASTOR'S WIFE**

In this way of functioning the wife sees herself involved in his work, and responsible in some degree for his success or failure in ministry. She often feels her life reflects heavily on her husband's ministry. (Ex. she may feel compelled to attend showers she doesn't want to.) If her husband changed to another kind of work, this would likely be threatening to her sense of self, to her identity. She is likely to see herself as "a pastor's wife"-an intimate part of who she is.

This role is unclear and complex. It is unique to ministry and probably the most common of the three. It usually has a profound impact on the marriage. She will often find it difficult to separate her "wifing" from her concerns about what is going on in the church. Though it is not usually conscious, she functions out of the perception that she needs to "wife" her husband differently than other women, because he is a pastor. When most men come home from work and talk about what is frustrating to them there, the wife does not have personal relationships with the people about whom her husband is talking. She has little at stake personally, so it is easier to "wife" her husband. This is challenging as a "pastor's wife" because she too is intimately involved with the people and the programs. She may have her own opinions about how things should be done and this can impair her ability to see what her husband needs as a man. In addition she does not have a pastor. in the normal sense of the word.

It is common for women in this role, especially in the years when children are at home, to have very little life of her own. She is very invested in her husband's calling and "job". Though this is true of many women in this stage of life, it is probably more common in the lives of pastors' wives.

This role also impacts how a man "husbands" his wife. If she gets anxious about things going on at church, it is difficult for him to comfort her because he may be anxious about the same issue or he may disagree with her as to how the situation should be handled. This complicates and often impairs his ability to see his wife as a woman in need of "husbanding". He may distance himself because he feels criticized or because he feels misunderstood. He may also feel demeaned that she does not trust the way he does his job. In reality, her suggestions are probably rooted in her own anxiety rather than in a critical spirit toward him.

This mixing of the work and the marriage often leaves the woman feeling alone, uncared for ("unhusbanded") and the husband feeling untrusted, disrespected ("unwifed").

This way of functioning of the pastor's wife is also unclear and confusing to the members of the congregation. Some will treat her as a fellow member and see her as a friend. Others will treat her differently according to how they are currently feeling toward her husband. This is both painful and unbalancing for the pastor's wife. She hardly knows who to trust.

Though the role we're calling "pastor's wife" is inherently difficult, it is the calling of the majority of spouses of pastors in our denomination. Working through the complexities is important in our faith journey as loved ones of Jesus and as called into the high calling of ministry.

## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1. It is your responsibility to decide.

The functions of a pastor's wife are unclear and vary with time and location, and they are often affected by the culture (expectations) of the church. Therefore, it is imperative that the pastoral couple decide together, under the authority of the Lord, what her role is to be and how that will work together with her functioning as his wife and he as her husband. The marital role must be priority. This decision probably has to be made over time as situations occur; the wife and husband must talk freely about each's reaction and pray together as to what principle to use in deciding how each will function in the marriage and in the ministry.

In most cases, because the congregation does not hire the wife, the decision as to how she will function is the right and responsibility of the pastor and wife, not of the congregation. If the pastoral couple is secure in their roles, pressures from the congregation can be resisted. Congregations need to be educated as to appropriate expectations. For example, if a member wants your husband to do something, can he tell you? (The healthy answer is NO!) Establishing the boundaries is the responsibility of the couple; do not depend on the church to solve this problem. Conflict with how the church perceives her role are manageable when the pastor and spouse stand together with certainty of how God is leading them.

2. The wife's role may shift from one to another as outlined below, but the pastoral couple needs to talk about this change and be clear as to their expectations of one another.

A "wife of a pastor", when her children are grown, may become more invested in her husband's ministry and become "pastor's wife".. A "pastor's wife", when her children are grown, may go back to school or use the education she obtained earlier to branch into her own career and she may shift to the "wife of pastor" role. Or a woman who's functioned as "pastor's wife" may shift into the "ministry partner" role.

3. None of these is superior or inferior to another. How God leads you will be right for you.

The important factor is that husband and wife agree. The role you are in does not reflect who you are, but how you'll function. It reflects your calling, not your character or your value. All three require spiritual maturity.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. To husband: how does it affect you when you sense your wife is anxious about what is happening in the church and how you're handling that?

What do you feel?

What do you do when you see that?

To wife: what affect does it have on you when you sense your husband's anger, sadness, frustration or fear about what is happening in the church? What do you feel?

What do you usually do when you see that?

2. Husband to wife: to what degree do you feel responsible for my success or failure in ministry? Use a scale from 0 to 100 with 0 meaning "not at all responsible" and 100 meaning "totally responsible".

Explain your reasons.

Wife to husband: same as above.

Explain your reasons.

3. Discuss: How important is being a "pastor" or "pastor's wife" to my sense of identify; i. e., who am I if I am not in ministry or if I "fail"? or if my husband were not in ministry or if he "failed"?

4. To wife: How have you experienced "wifing" a pastor being different than if your husband were in another career? Is there more that we haven't discussed above?

To husband: How have you experienced "husbanding" a pastor's wife to be different than if you were not in ministry? Is there more than what we have already discussed?

5. To wife: how does it affect you when your husband is being criticized?

To husband: how do you see it affecting your marriage when you are being criticized?