
Does It Seem too Hard?

THE LORD MEANT IT FOR GOOD

Short Stories of
Encouragement for the
Replant Pastor Wife

The Replant Wife Spouse Care Team has selected blogs from Replantwife.com to encourage the Pastor Wife in her ministry as she strives to be effective in her Replant or Revitalization. The selections are written from Replant wives to Replant wives. May women feel comfort and receive insight on their journey to glorify God in redeeming dying churches.

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CHAPTER 1

THE LORD MEANT IT FOR GOOD

Erin Cofield

Most of us are familiar with the story of Joseph, Jacob's favorite child by his favorite wife. Genesis 37 begins with a 17-year-old Joseph getting his famous "coat of many colors," and tattling on his brothers. Unsurprisingly, his brothers didn't like him very much. The Bible tells us they "hated him" and could not "speak peacefully to him" (verse 4).

Joseph has a dream in which he and his brothers are gathering sheaves. Their stalks bow down to

his stalk. When he tells his brothers his dream, they correctly interpret it as saying they will bow to him. In a second dream, Joseph sees the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing to him. He tells his brothers and father this dream, and his father rebukes him, again correctly interpreting it as Joseph will eventually “rule” over the rest of the family. But the Bible tells us that even in his rebuking, Jacob “kept the saying in mind” (verse 11).

Sometime later, Joseph is looking for his brothers, who are pasturing the sheep. When he comes to them, they conspire to kill him, but Reuben, the oldest, stops them and instead convinces them to place him in a pit (possibly a well) in the ground, intending to return later to rescue Joseph from the pit. While Reuben is away, however, the brothers see a caravan of Ishmaelites coming and decide instead to make some profit by selling Joseph to the caravan to be sold as a slave. When Reuben returns, he is distraught, but the brothers decide to slaughter a goat, dip Joseph’s coat in its blood, and then

bring it to their father, stating that they “found” it. Jacob declares that a wild animal must have killed Joseph and begins mourning him. The chapter ends with the traders selling Joseph to Potiphar, the Pharaoh’s captain in Egypt.

While I occasionally wear colorful outerwear, I can't say that I always see a connection between my life and Joseph's. I don't pretend to be the favorite child– I'm sure that honor goes to my mom's dog, Max. And while I may have tattled on my brother, he never transferred his anger into selling me to a passing caravan. However, something in Joseph's story struck me that we can all relate to.

Ultimately, this passage communicates that God can use the worst circumstances and the most challenging moments in our lives for His plans and glory. The Lord gave Joseph a vision that he would someday rule and reign over his family. If I were Joseph, I wouldn't have shared that vision with the family, especially the brothers, who already hated him. However, if he had not shared

that vision with them, they may not have had the impetus to try to get rid of him.

When we continue the story in Genesis, we read that the Lord used this circumstance, along with several others, to eventually have Joseph in a place where not only did he rule over his family (as in his dream), but he also had the capacity and resources to save them from famine. The Lord accomplished his plan for Joseph's life, but used what was most likely the worst day of Joseph's life to do it.

When my children were little, I read the book *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* with them, especially if they were having their own terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. My kids are all grown adults now, but now and then, one of them will text or call and say, "Mom, I am having a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day." And just like the mom in the book, I respond, "Some days are like that."

Maybe you are going through a day like that— or maybe at this point, it feels more like a season of

yucky days. But guess what? The story of Joseph reminds us that God uses even our worst days for His glory. Even the seemingly hopeless and frightening times are circumstances He uses to accomplish His plans for us.

In Genesis 50:20, after Jacob's death, Joseph's brothers fear that Joseph will treat them with contempt now that Jacob is gone. Instead, he reminds them: "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." The word "meant" is crucial because it reminds us that God didn't have to change His plan when Joseph's brothers sold him in Genesis 37. The Lord didn't have to "reroute" his plan as though Joseph's brothers made a wrong turn. Instead, the Lord *meant* to use it for good— it was always part of the Lord's plan. When faced with despair and pain in our circumstances, we must remind ourselves that the Lord is still in control, and He may be allowing this for a greater purpose in His plan. Our circumstances didn't catch Him off guard. Indeed, He may mean it for good.

In the Abrahamic covenant, the Lord promised redemption through Abraham's descendants. However, the Bible tells us in Genesis 42 that famine spread throughout the land. Jacob and his family (Joseph's brothers) were starving. In the 13 years since Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, Joseph has not only risen in rank but, through the interpretation of dreams and visions, has been able to plan for the famine and has food available. Without the events in Genesis 37, Joseph may have been starving with the rest of his family, and no one in Egypt would have planned for the famine. Being sold to the caravan eventually led Joseph to be in Pharaoh's household at the right time to save Abraham's lineage from starvation and death. Redemption to God through Abraham's seed could have been stopped as Abraham's descendants starved and died. Joseph reflects this to his brothers in Genesis 45:5-8, saying, "And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in

which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God.”

Our plans are not the Lord’s plans. I am sure that Joseph would have chosen a different path than to be sold into slavery by his brothers. I am sure that being stuck in a pit while your brothers talk about how to get rid of you and then being lifted out, hoping that they have changed their minds and are rescuing you, only to find yourself sold instead, stung a bit. But the Lord had other plans for Joseph. The Lord didn’t intend for Joseph to stay as he was.

Joseph was an impulsive boy when sold into slavery. But in the 13 years between Joseph’s slavery and the reunion with his family at the height of the famine, Joseph went from an impulsive child to a man who had been sold into slavery, imprisoned under a false accusation, found favor with Pharaoh, and then risen to

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heights of power. The Lord used those terrible circumstances to form Joseph into someone who could forgive his brothers and would care for them. The Lord used His plans to change Joseph, as He uses His plans to change us. Would we prefer a painless life? Yes! But the Lord may be using our pain to form us into who He needs us to be for His greater purpose and plan.

When faced with those seasons of overwhelming distress and despair, know this: The Lord has not abandoned you. He is entirely in control. Your circumstances don't catch the Lord off guard. He may be using it for your good and His glorious plan!

CHAPTER 2

OUT OF COMFORT AND INTO CALLING

LEADING CHANGE WITHIN YOU

Barb Bickford

*"Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."
Joshua 1:9*

When we moved to our small town outside the St. Louis metro area 14 years ago, I was confident it was our last move. Maybe that was just wishful thinking because I had moved a lot in my life to that point, but those 14 years were the longest I've ever lived anywhere, and I couldn't imagine ever leaving a place I loved so much. We had good

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friends, jobs we enjoyed, a church we loved, so many favorite restaurants, and the St. Louis Cardinals! Familiar routines felt safe, secure, and comfortable. It was a good place to live - a small Mayberry-ish town with close access to the big city, just like I always wanted. We were very settled. It's not as if we were 100% confident we would never move; we just believed that if we ever did, it would bring us closer to our kids and grandkids. That made sense to us; being near them was our heartfelt desire. It still is.

And yet... something surprising happened. The Lord began moving in our hearts, and slowly, we started discussing life outside of Missouri. Connections turned into invitations, which led to a growing undercurrent of longing and questioning—and before we knew it, a changing of the seasons.

We took a God-informed risk and headed south to Nashville, Tennessee. Instead of moving closer to our children and grandchildren, we were moving farther away from all our family to a new

city where we didn't know anyone. Even so, we were confident that God was leading us, which gave us peace. When you take a step of faith, you often discover that God's initial guidance may lead to a leap of faith, another step, and a step after that.

In Acts 17:26-27, Paul reminds us that God determines the timelines and boundaries of our lives so that we may seek Him. "From one man, he has made every nationality to live over the whole earth and has determined their appointed times and the boundaries of where they live. He did this so that they might seek God, and perhaps they might reach out and find him, though he is not far from each one of us." His providence is evident if your eyes are open and your heart is sensitive to his guidance. He places us where he wants us for his purposes, not ours. And sometimes, he moves us physically for the same reasons.

We rented a cute little house just down the street from a church plant that was only about 1 1/2 years

old. The very first Sunday we were in town, we decided to visit. What a delight to just walk to church! Our pastor in STL had recommended a list of congregations to visit during our relocation process, and unbeknownst to us, when we purchased our house, this church was on his list! Finding new grocery stores, hair stylists, and mechanics is one thing. Searching for a new community of faith is an entirely different thing. That little church, primarily composed of young, devoted individuals in their 20s and 30s, has become our spiritual home. They lovingly welcomed us in and are now friends. Even though we are closer to their parents' age, we love them, and they love us. We intended to visit several churches until we found the one where God was leading us. But we soon realized this was the one for us, and those other visits weren't necessary. We grew to love the pastors and members of this small yet thriving church, which was still in its early stages of development. Not only that, but we also knew this was a church full of people to whom we could offer support and minister.

Two and a half months later, we each joined a discipleship group. The book study was Joshua. How perfect! If you know anything about the book of Joshua, you know that God sent him out to lands unknown. There were so many unknowns. But just like us, all Joshua had to do was be strong and courageous and follow God's plans. Simple, right?!

However, just a few months later, we faced another transition: this time, in our employment. The job that led us to Music City came to an unexpected end. While we were confident that God led us to move here, we weren't sure what was next. What was God doing? We just got here. What are we supposed to do now? If I'm being honest, it felt a little like God was being somewhat tricky with us. I know that isn't how He works; that's how it felt in my flesh then. He never deceives us just to get us to do something. However, He will shake things up at times. Trusting Him was our only option.

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We knew three things: we didn't want to pack up and move again, we loved our church, and we believed God was up to something. We just didn't know what. As you can imagine, we were sometimes a bit anxious with the uncertainty of a new city, unfamiliar surroundings, and no clear path forward. It made for some interesting days and restless nights. But ultimately, we both had peace about it, even in the uncertainty.

Once again, our only option was to trust God, so we decided to do just that. We encouraged each other along the way and asked our friends and church family to join us in prayer.

Before we knew of the impending job change, a different opportunity had presented, inviting my husband to consider an alternative career path. While honored, it seemed the timing wasn't quite right since we had just arrived in town. But it quickly became clear that God was moving in that direction. We learned that this new career path was why God brought us to Nashville.

Confirmation after confirmation has made that clear.

Throughout all those significant life changes, my question for God was, “What do you have for me in the midst of all this?” Joshua led the nation of Israel into a land the Lord promised them. He wasn’t always sure about it, but he did trust the Lord. That journey wasn’t composed of one step but of many. And some of them weren’t steps but leaps of faith. The point of entry would not be the final destination. We indeed found that to be true for us. Conflicts, conquests, setbacks, moments of doubt, and re-clarification of promises made were all part of his journey and ours. Where you start is not where you will end. The ground between those points creates an opportunity to grow, exercise faith, and trust God.

Don’t be afraid. Just like God commanded Joshua, be strong and very courageous. Enjoy seeing how God guides and provides as you walk new ground.

LEADING CHANGE WITHIN OTHERS

One of the redundant tasks of Church Replant and Revitalization is initiating change in the church. There are numerous reasons for change; some are spiritual, while others are not. It is possible that books in the church's library have lost their God-centric focus, and a purge may be necessary to protect young readers. Perhaps the flower room needs to be sorted, as the flowers are disintegrating, and the congregation is noticeably experiencing allergic reactions upon entering the sanctuary. More profound changes may be necessary, such as updating bylaws, restructuring leadership, or reallocating budgets. As silly as some changes seem, they can strike a nerve in all of us.

As pastors' wives, we get a front-row seat to see how others respond to change. When we witness some less-than-Christian behaviors from our fellow church members during a season of change, it can be easy to fall into our automatic

responses. We can be quick to want to say, “Just follow the leadership or move out of the way,” or “Hey, that is my husband you are talking about!” maybe even, “Don’t be a jerk,” or the self-loathing “we gave up everything to come serve you, and this is what we get!” Left unchecked, these responses can lead to bitterness (Hebrews 12:15), grudges (Mark 11:26), assumptions, broken relationships (Proverbs 13:10), and, worst of all, a defeated mentality about the work God has called us to (Hebrews 3:12).

How can we redeem these circumstances as another opportunity to love the people God has handed us to shepherd? How can we find compassion for the congregation struggling with change? If we can identify where they are in the process, this might give us a window into their heart. If we can see things from their perspective for a moment, it might help us walk the journey of change with them rather than waiting at the finish line, shaming them with a finger-wagging, “I told you this would work out!” attitude.

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There are five stages of change:

1. Pre-contemplation (not considering change despite external pressures)
2. Contemplation (considering action but ambivalent about change)
3. Preparation (planning for change in the future)
4. Action (making changes)
5. Maintenance (maintaining gains and preventing relapses)."

Let's give these stages names we can all relate to:

Precontemplation is Pessimist Peggy. She loves pointing out that this is how we have always done it. Her motto is, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." The library is not hurting anyone, just sitting there.

The contemplative stage gives us Calculated Carol. She has a question about everything that usually starts with, "What if..." What if Aunt Bessy finds out we trashed her beloved books? What if we get rid of a book, and then need it?

The preparation stage introduces us to Prepper Patty. You can count on Prepper Patty to inform you of the financial, relational, and time-related costs of this change. She has already determined the value of the books we are throwing away... I mean donating! She is on board with revamping the library, but can come across as negative due to her preparedness.

We don't tend to have as many heart palpitations with the team in the action and maintenance stages, but for our name game, let's give them new names, too. Action Alice is a go-getter, and you have difficulty slowing her down. She has bought in on the change, lock, stock, and barrel. Action Alice is willing to "die on the hill," purging the donated books that Aunt Bessy donated on her deathbed.

Then there is Maintenance Maddy; she loves a system and direction. Maintenance Maddy will take the mission to the next level with her new requirements for donating books to the library.

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There will be no relapse to an unkept library under her watch.

At some point, we all go on a journey with each character. It is a process. Some of us linger with one character longer than another, but we do pass through each stage. The goal for the church is to arrive together and maintain the necessary changes to replant or revitalize the church God has called us to. If we can identify where the struggling members are in the process, we can understand them better and love them more effectively.

People's reactions when they experience change can reveal much about their stage in the change process. If we can identify which change “friend” they are dealing with, we can better walk alongside them. When we talk with Pessimist Peggy, she says, “It is fine the way it is.” Perhaps you have a personal testimony to help her understand the need to update the library. Maybe your child checked out “Seven Spells of the Stars,

Intro to Black Magic?” She loves your kids; perhaps that would help her reach the next stage.

When you meet with “Calculated Carol,” struggling with all the “what-ifs,” you could help by turning the questions around. What if we don’t change? What if we do nothing? Acknowledge that her questions are valid and that the Lord has gifted her with the ability to see potential dangers. Then, encourage her to help with the process so she can assist in navigating the challenges as they arise.

When meeting with “Prepper Patty,” you may need to use the word “start” so she can stop with all the planning. Prepper Patty will continue to plan, adjust, and recalibrate until Jesus comes if we let her.

Recognizing where our congregation members are in the stages of change can help our frustration turn into compassion. When we share love under challenging seasons, we can set the tone for everyone else.

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Some people become stuck in one stage, leaving us to wonder if they will ever reach the action stage of change. However, we cannot control them or delve into their minds to discover the root cause of their stagnation, but it is still possible to show compassion for the person who seemingly makes no effort to get on board.

Romans 8:1-11 tells us we have the power of the Holy Spirit within us, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. If the Holy Spirit can do that, imagine what God can do for us if we allow Him. Giving Bookkeeper Betty the cold shoulder or a stare-down is not controlling our responses; that is simply giving in to the autonomic reactions. Reflecting on our natural inclination and adjusting our responses to edify the body of Christ is a great place to start.

The next step is to identify the stage of change the member is struggling with, so you can meet them there.

What do we do when struggling members fail to meet our expectations, conflict arises, or members leave due to the projected change? Keep it simple! Support the church's leadership and love the struggling members. Remember, the church is a body, and we can only operate at our best when we are all focused on the same God-centric goals. Learning to deal with unmet expectations and saying goodbye to long-time members are lessons we only get with time. People are going to leave, and that's okay. These seasons are critical aspects of our job as we strive to preserve the life of the church and encourage individual lives as well.

Our ability to maintain longevity in the Replant the Lord has called us to will require time. Time to wait for struggling members to catch up to the team as change happens. The more they experience the change with compassion from others, the more likely they will move faster through the stages the next time change is needed. In our neck of the woods, change is a

snowball effect; one change leads to another and another!

My husband recently preached through Revelation 2:1-7, specifically regarding the Church of Ephesus. As I heard him speak, I thought, “Wow, the apostle John is describing a church in revitalization in this bible passage!” Suppose we understand the lampstands to represent the churches and the stars to represent the preachers or shepherds. In that case, we can see ourselves as wives to the pastor in the struggling church, and what we can become if we lose sight of compassion for our members while leading them through change.

Jesus begins the letter to Ephesus by commending the church for removing evil from the church and testing the false teachers. (I started to pat myself on the back; I can see we are doing this!) John continues by telling them that he sees them in their toil and patient endurance to uphold the truths of the gospel. (Thank you, John, for noticing my hard work!) However, he

then scolds them. The church has forgotten its first calling: To love!

We can become so focused on making the church pure, holy, and righteous that we forget to love others along the way as we are “doing church.” It is easy to love those who share our views. I don’t think John was saying, “Hey, love the easy one more.” He was saying you have abandoned your post to love your sheep, even (perhaps especially) the difficult ones. Then he calls the stars to repent, or He will remove the lampstand. Ninety-year-old John has been around the church block a few times.

Sitting in the pew that night, hearing those words, I felt like John would have told me to fix my face and start being nicer to people as they journey through change, or else! I had abandoned my first calling to God’s people! I am to love them as he first loved me (John 13:34-35), and I should overlook offenses (Proverbs 19:11).

Reflecting on this, I thought about the five stages of change: Peggy, Carol, Patty, Alice, and Maddy. It would be good for us to recognize the privilege of the pastor's wife in the change process.

1. We hear our husband's prayers about the change long before the congregation does. We discuss this with our own internal “Pessimist Peggy” in our prayers, as we value the considered change.
2. Then we move on to Calculated Carol and sort out the what-ifs and how this change aligns with our husband's long view of the church.
3. We then get with Prepper Patty in our mental space and count the cost. We don't have to consider the sentimental attachment because we don't have a long history in the church, but we do have to consider how to fit another time-consuming project into our schedule.
4. When the idea of change reaches the business meeting and the church forms a committee, we have already moved into Action Alice mode and are eager to move forward.

5. Finally, we have already figured out how to prevent this mistake from happening again, like Maintenance Maddy.

It is easy to forget that the congregation will need time to go through all the stages of change, just as we did at our own pace. How can I walk with these members in love? How can I reach out to them with compassion as they see an establishment they have been giving to for decades change? They were once Maintenance Maddy, setting new standards, and now they are Pessimist Peggy. How can we encourage them to explore new things?

Perhaps this resembles writing a heartfelt card to acknowledge Peggy's service and dedication to the church, thanking her for keeping the lights on. We could invite Carol for coffee and ask her how her kids are doing in college. Can we hug Patty on Sunday and tell her how much you depend on her stability? I pray for you, sweet sister, that you may turn your frustration into

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compassion and that whatever you do, you may do it in love.

CHAPTER 3

LIVING INSIDE YOUR CALLING

COUNT IT ALL JOY!

Darlene Dryer

I was thinking the other day about suffering, and I wondered...what is it good for? During a struggle, is it possible to find a use for it? Can we navigate the turmoil to our benefit? Often, in our suffering, we turn inward and lose sight of hope or cannot see Christ at work in the details. Seeing God's plan is not in our scope of understanding when it feels like we are drowning. Can we train

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our minds to look for God's hand, recognize our growth, and rejoice amid our struggles?

Let's start by going back to the basics. It is easy to overthink situations, make circumstances more complicated than they should be, and lose sight of our goals when our foundation is shaky. We start grasping at straws like Eve in the garden. She thought God was holding something back from her. So, she took the fruit and shared it with Adam, and then they both hid and blamed the snake when the Lord confronted them. Do you see how quickly we can spiral out of control in our responses when we are not grounded?

Who are we?

In Genesis 1:28, God gives us our role: "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it.'" We are to be bearers of fruit. The Lord is looking for us to mature over time. Galatians 5:22-23 teaches us about the nine fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

gentleness, and self-control. God has also asked us to be multipliers, which has a double meaning. First, yes, we physically have children, bringing them up in the way of the Lord, but also, as New Testament believers, we spiritually multiply by sharing the gospel. When God says 'subdue the earth,' He asks that we, as image bearers, represent Him in creation by acting like Him.

Not only are we to mature, multiply, and imitate the Lord, but He made us of two aspects, given to us in Genesis 2:7, "then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature." We are both physical and spiritual beings. Many times, one affects the other, like when you get nervous (spirit), your palms sweat (physical), or you have a chronic illness (physical) that leads to situational depression (spiritual). Do you see the dynamic here? Knowing who we are is essential to seeking solutions and finding purpose in troubled times. Paul provides a case study in 2 Timothy 2:3-6 to help us view ourselves through a new lens during

suffering and trials. He introduces us to three characters: a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer. Soldiers are reminded not to be entangled in civilian pursuits, as their primary aim is to please the one who enlisted them. The governing body for an athlete will not crown him unless he competes according to the rules. And the hard-working farmer ought to have the first share of the crops.

We can use this picture to understand who we are and know how we are to act. We are to focus on the task God has called us to, as the soldier seeks to please his officers. We are to be devoted, like athletes, and do the hard things, even when we want to press snooze a few more times. Like the farmer, if we are focused and prepared, we will reap a harvest or benefit from our toil.

Who is God?

In our suffering, it can be easy to forget who we are, but just as easy to forget who God is! But the

Lord's attributes can become even sweeter when we seek these truths during seasons of suffering. Lamentations 3:37-38 says, "Who is there who speaks, and it happens unless the Lord has ordained it? Do not both adversity and good come from the mouth of the Most High?" Ecclesiastes 7:14 says, "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity, consider: God has made the one as well as the other so that no one can discover anything that will come after him." We cannot understand how this works as we have limited vision. But the word is true, and it confirms **God is in control.**

God also understands our suffering personally. Hebrews 4:14-16 says, "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens—Jesus the Son of God—let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness

so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need."

Sometimes, we do not feel that God is with us. However, He does not move. It is we who have the wandering spirit. We will have to choose to draw close to him to experience what Joshua experiences in Joshua 1:9, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." **God is with you.**

What is this for?

When we discuss preparing for trials, understanding why they occur is beneficial. The Lord is gracious to us by spelling it out in James 1:2-4, "Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its full effect so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing."

From these verses, we understand that suffering tests or builds our faith. It aims to produce steadfastness or endurance, meaning that what we go through today will help us navigate tomorrow.

As we prepare for trials before they come or use this teaching to find footing amid a heavy heart, we have a choice on how we would like to respond.

What Tools do I have?

When we struggle, we must remember that we have some tools in our toolbox to help us. We will need to rely on them in the struggle to endure.

First, we have a shield of faith. Ephesians 6:13 and 16 visually represent the shield of faith and its purpose. “For this reason, take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand... In every situation, take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” How is your

shield of faith? Are you holding it in position? Have you lowered it? Are fiery darts getting past you? As Paul discusses, when we have not yet built up our faith, may we be like the father pleading with Jesus to heal his son and cry out in Mark 9:24, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Next, we have support systems. Do you have people around you who lift you, keep you biblically accountable, and share your burdens, or are you allowing triangulating relationships where they only tell you what you want to hear? Wise counsel is supported in scripture in Proverbs 1:5 and 11:14, "Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance... Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors, there is safety." Sharing your burden is also a biblical idea. Galatians 6:2, "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Often, we keep things to ourselves because we don't want to bother others, but this verse suggests that if we don't allow others to grow in their faith alongside us and see God at work in the trenches with us, we may be

exercising pride. Proverbs 12:15 says, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice." Do not self-sabotage. Let others in the circle!

The most important person in your support system should be God. He should be the first one you go to when you wake up, feel weak, or go to bed. Hold on to Him like never before. Clinging to the Father is what it looks like to build steadfastness. Make sure God is not sitting on the bench during the trial. He is the MVP; don't forget that!

We also have biblical revelation to look toward. You can train yourself to have this mindset. For example, where are you or others growing in the suffering? Look at Joseph. His brothers sold him into slavery, but later he was able to save all the Israelites from famine. Ruth had a significant loss, but that put her in the hands of Boaz and, eventually, in the lineage of Jesus. If you can't see it yet, you can hope for it, as we are promised eternal life in a perfect heaven.

Lastly, do not forget about the all-important tool of time. Time is your friend. How do you create a bridge? With the tremendous amount of effort from both sides and TIME.

How Can I Praise God in This?

First, we must reframe our hearts and minds to see trials as a blessing because of what they produce rather than focusing on what we have lost. We can do this with a pre-planned verbal response._Paul responds to suffering this way: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice." He wrote that while awaiting a death sentence from a jail cell. Job teaches us what *not* to do through his 28 chapters of arguing, negotiating, and demanding of God. He found peace only when he realized God was enough, and Job didn't need an explanation. We can have a pre-planned response that helps us reframe our mindset to be thankful, joyful, and rejoice in the hope of a Savior who works things out for the best.

We also need to have a physical response. During trials and struggles, we often forget the basics, such as breathing. We need oxygen. Without it, we limit our ability to make good decisions and hamper our physical performance. So, BREATHE! In through the nose and out through the mouth. Give this a go for about ten repetitions. Recite scripture on the inhale and exhale for a bonus focus.

Sometimes, we get caught up in the drama and experience a form of dissociation. We must return to reality from this distant place. You can do a grounding exercise using your five senses: see five things, feel four things, hear three things, smell two things, and taste one thing.

Through breathing and grounding, you give yourself time to process and push the information past your emotional amygdala and into your logical prefrontal cortex. You will most likely feel your anxiety float away, leaving you a manageable level of concern to work with.

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You can journal a timeline of all the events that are troubling you. Draw a line across the paper. On top of the line, write the events in the order in which they happened. At the bottom of the line, write all the lovely things you see God doing during the trauma. This exercise helps to organize your thoughts and advance your logical thinking when you feel like everything is spiraling out of control.

Another way to recall your faith is to list ten ways God has worked things out in the past. Being able to see it on paper helps you have hope that God will do it again. You might see where God delivered a better plan than yours. Hopefully, the Holy Spirit will remind you to confidently include "Not my will but yours, Father," into your prayers.

As you face trials, I pray you can prepare, preserve, and praise God amid the suffering. Count it all joy, my friend!

CHAPTER 4

SHINE LIKE STARS

BEING A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Barb Bickford

When I was little, we lived in the country on a farm in mid-Missouri. At night, you could look up to the sky and see ALL the stars. It was glorious! From inside the house, the sky looked pitch black. But when we went outside, away from the house's light, we could see the pinpricks of light shining through - some bigger and brighter than others. The darkness, no matter how massive, could not snuff out the light of the stars. **Light can't help but pierce the darkness.**

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Likewise, as believers in Jesus, we shine like stars, piercing the darkness. We do this through our kindness, how we treat others, our generosity, and our service. The darkness of this world is unable to overcome the light of Jesus. God has created us so that when we have a personal relationship with Him, He shines through us, through our sins and the darkness of this world. But when we take our eyes off Him, there's "the rub," as Shakespeare would say. If we aren't looking to Him as our source of light, we are easily distracted by the things of the world.

How do we remain focused when darkness seems to creep in at every turn? I'm sure you can think of something in the last couple of weeks that frustrated or distracted you. Maybe something hasn't gone the way you hoped it would. How did you handle that? I know I can be prone to grumble and even become argumentative.

As humans, our go-to reaction can be complaining when things get difficult or don't turn out as planned. We look inward because we

are selfish beings. We focus on ourselves instead of God. At times, shining bright for Jesus seems impossible. We cannot muster up the strength to do this on our own. Not to worry— God has equipped us to obey and live a life that honors Him. He has given us the tools (namely, the Bible and other Christ-followers) to help keep us on track. He wants us to live like Christ and shine in this dark world. We can't do it alone, but we absolutely **can** when we allow Him to work in and through us.

Ministry is difficult. Being the wife of a Replant Pastor is difficult. We can find ourselves complaining about the struggle rather than striving to be blameless and pure. Giving in to our selfishness (letting darkness overtake us) feels much easier. God's plan for us is to live in a close relationship with Him, but as with any relationship, it takes time and effort to be healthy. When we spend our time complaining about our circumstances or wallowing in our self-pity, the bright light we had hoped to share dims, sometimes to a flicker. Even in the most difficult

of circumstances, let's be grateful for the opportunity to show the evidence of Christ in us.

Several years ago, a friend and I took a long road trip to visit our daughters in college. I shared with her a significant trial that our family was experiencing. It came on the heels of another family tragedy. As someone who didn't yet know Jesus, she wondered how I could handle all of these things. I could have grumbled about the difficulty of it all, but instead, it became an excellent opportunity to share with her the hope I have in Jesus. So, even in a time that felt crushing to my soul, His light could shine through the darkness. It was not through my strength but purely the Father working through me.

In Philippians 2:14-16, Paul reminds us to do everything without grumbling and arguing so that we will be blameless and pure. This Christlike attitude sets us apart as children of God to be faultless in a world that is crooked and perverted. This "setting apart" is us shining like stars. Does this mean He expects us to be perfect?

Of course not. That is out of our reach. However, he wants us to hold firm to the Message of life, the Word of the Lord.

What, or better stated, *WHO* is the Message of life? **Jesus**. We must hold firm to Jesus. When we hold firm to Him and hide the Word in our hearts, those around us can't help but see the difference in our lives. They see the light shining bright! John 1:5 says, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

My Discipleship Group at church is currently studying Philippians. Recently, we focused on Philippians 2:12-18. Part of our study is to summarize the passage. I like to do it casually, in a "this is how we talk" way. My summary of verses 14 & 15 was, "Don't be fussy, but honor God in the way you live - standing out and apart from the world." Don't be fussy, friends! Being a grumbling complainer gets us nowhere, and certainly not closer to God. On the other hand, honoring God in how we live speaks volumes to

non-Christians watching us. It puts the focus rightly on Him.

Yes, being a pastor's wife can be difficult, but let's not forget what an honor and blessing it can be! This time of year is a perfect reminder to be grateful for the opportunity to minister this way. You may not consider your role as a ministry, but it is. You have the excellent opportunity to speak truth into the lives of those in your congregation in a way you may not have if you weren't the pastor's wife. It puts you in a unique position. Shine bright, friends!

I know being a pastor's wife is not all sunshine and roses. Sometimes, things are dark and heavy. The devil will throw everything he has at you to keep you in grumbling and distress. I have learned that, as the song says, I must praise Him in the storm. The Lord is with us no matter what state we are in. When things are rough, it's easy to feel like God has forgotten about us. But praising him for ***who he is*** reminds us that he *does* care for us. He is with us! Philippians 4:10,

11, and 19 say, “I rejoiced in the Lord greatly because once again you renewed your care for me. You were, in fact, concerned about me... I don’t say this out of need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I find myself. And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”

It’s okay to be honest with God about how you feel, even when He hasn’t answered your prayers as you had hoped. Instead of grumbling and complaining or arguing with Him, praise Him for who He is and how he hasn’t forgotten you. Praise Him for how He answers your prayers and how you will grow through that answer. He hasn’t left you. He has a perfect plan for you. And he’s there with you, friends.

Matthew 5:14-16 is a good reminder. It says, “You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others so

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that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”

I may be dating myself here, but do you remember that song we used to sing when we were little? “This little light of mine! I’m gonna let it shine! This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine. This little light of mine! I’m gonna let it shine! Let it shine! Let it shine! Let it shine!” Be bold, sisters, and let your light shine bright for Jesus!

CHAPTER 5

HOW TO DEAL WITH DETRACTORS AND DISTRACTORS

Joyce Jackson

I'll let you in on a terrible secret as we consider church renewal: In every church, someone will rise to challenge the leadership at some point in time. And they may turn on you and your family in an attempt to gain control. If handled well, the church can become stronger and healthier in resolving this challenge.

It is such a shock when Christians come against ministry plans or launch personal attacks. But know that this is normal. It tests church boundaries, your husband's spiritual integrity,

leadership skills, and wisdom as a pastor. While this is difficult, it allows your husband to develop spiritual muscle. Can he deal with this without losing his temper? Can he be compassionate and also authoritative? Can you recognize that this is not your fight or your burden?

The antagonist typically desires to grab control and gain authority over the direction of the ministry, which is dangerous. If God has called and ordained the ministry to move forward along a God designed path, with God-called ministry leaders, and that person gets in God's way, they will be answering to Him.

These types of people affect you if you give them time and attention. God requires that we listen to HIM and obey- no matter what others say or do. The hard part is reminding others in the church that the ultimate purpose of the church is to bring glory to God and people into His Kingdom. Personal preferences must always be subject to that prime directive. If not, the idea of "control" in a church can become an idol.

One of the saddest Bible stories is about the older prophet who lied and the man of God who died. In 1 Kings 13, God sent a “man of God” from Judah to prophesy against King Jeroboam of Israel. The man of God carefully kept God’s three-fold command: do not eat, do not drink, and go home a different way. But an older prophet sent him a different message saying, “I also am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, ‘Bring him back with you into your house that he may eat bread and drink water.’” (verse 18)

I’m sure the younger man of God had respect for the older prophet. But the older prophet was lying; He made up the new direction to suit his purposes. He didn’t respect God’s word over his wishes. There was no angel visit or message from the Lord to stay.

The older prophet received a *true* message during the meal and reported it to the younger: “This is what the Lord says: ‘You have defied the word of the Lord and have not kept the command the

Lord your God gave you.” (1 Kings 13:21-22). On the young prophet’s way home, a lion killed him. His ministry ended because he listened to someone (a mature leader, even) whom he respected, rather than leaning into what he knew God told him.

One of the ways we can avoid distraction is by recording what we know God has said. Start with God’s priorities. Write down the church’s mission and vision that has been prayed over and directed by God for His biblical mission purposes. Does what people say align with the church’s mission and vision for reaching the lost and growing disciples? Write down a personal mission statement and reflect on God’s calling on your life. Then, when the distractors get loud, you can ask if this aligns with who God created and called you to be.

I think the writer of Psalm 57:4 knew a bit about detractors as he wrote, “I am surrounded by lions; I lie down with those who devour men. Their teeth are spears and arrows; their tongues are

sharp swords.” But he started in verse 1 with, “Be gracious to me, God, be gracious to me, for I take refuge in You. I will seek refuge in the shadow of Your wings until danger passes.” Then in verse six, he continues, “They prepared a net for my steps; I was despondent. They dug a pit ahead of me, but they fell into it!” He ends the psalm giving glory to God.

A Christian counselor, Alex Orem, says, “Often those who speak direct or indirect insults to us are themselves being tormented by the forces of hell. So those pivotal words spoken by Jesus and demonstrated by His lifestyle, ‘Don’t return insult for insult,’ and the words, ‘bless those who curse you,’ become all the more revolutionary, a diamond of wisdom in the rough of society. In blessing the one who insults you, you refuse to sing over that person the same declaration that Satan is singing. Instead, you declare what God wants to say to them in humility and ... perhaps God may grant them repentance.”

Picture a stadium of spiritual conflict. We are not in the field in the spiritual battle, as that is God's domain. We are in the band, praising and praying. However, what we *voice* determines whose side we are on. We can be Christians and voice things that support the wrong side. God calls us to speak the truth in love. Turning the other cheek, not speaking vengeful words. Instead of reactions, these actions prove our trust that God is a God of justice and mercy. We can trust Him to do what is right.

If the detractors or distractors are speaking about you or your husband directly, ask if you are doing what God wants from you to support the biblical vision and mission. If you are being obedient to God, everything else is a distraction.

CHAPTER 6

FACING YOUR FEARS

Joyce Jackson

I've had a couple of panic attacks- it is like being eaten by an invisible monster. Strangely, they pounce out of the blue when you aren't expecting or thinking of anything stressful. Another word for this type of panic? Fear.

Fear will drive you to unholy ends. Fear reduces blood flow to the brain, compromising the power to think of solutions. Fear can be so debilitating. Sometimes, we even need counseling to get to the root of the pain that is creating the fear, which can

spin off panic attacks like emotional twisters. (If you are there now, or you are with someone else in panic mode, a simple method for getting past the immediate episode is to hand them a magazine or page of print and ask them to circle all of “the” and “and” words because the brain is designed to process one procedure at a time. Allowing the brain to focus on something innocuous will help it stabilize.) Fear and panic are huge red flags that something needs attention and healing.

My panic attacks happened when I was driving, once driving into a tunnel and once driving into a car wash. You do not want to experience panic when you are behind the wheel! Thankfully, I traced the panic attacks back to the source of a painful experience that I thought I had no control over. In identifying the pain problem, I realized that I was responsible for setting a healthy boundary to protect my family. Fear blinds us, hobbling us from rooting out the source and setting healthy boundaries.

Experiencing fear is part of the human condition while we are on this side of heaven. Those who have no fear are a danger to themselves and others. Fear speaks to us and tells us good things, like "stay on the sidewalk because a car might be coming," but it also tells us bad things, like "you can't do this; you'll never make it." But discerning what is true and what is false about what fear says is hard when you're under assault.

I will admit that recently, fear jumped behind the wheel in my life. I didn't invite it in. I was saying and praying all the right things. But this pronouncement came from outside my control. It crashed in and opened the door for fear to crawl behind the wheel, driving my thoughts and stalling any positive direction. It was as if this pronouncement spilled coffee all down my front and then mocked me for being a wreck. I was sad, angry, hurt, tired, and defeated, but it was fear that just made me want to disappear. It was fear of judgment from the same source and anyone else who might see me as they did. In truth, this wasn't even a big problem. I've had cancer, a

miscarriage, a child threatened, family deaths...
But this minor fear served as a lesson.

I tried to reach for boldness to kick fear out, but I could not force boldness into the driver's seat. I prayed, but the weight of inadequacy sat on my chest. So, I prayed a more basic and honest prayer: LORD, I don't know what to do, but I need some help. Staying stuck here does not bring you honor in any way.

God showed me that my faith walk, even now, isn't about my strength. It isn't about my ability to grab God's hand and pull Him into my concerns. Instead, it's a transfer of power—my inadequacy for His sufficiency. Instead, I must give up and ask God to take my hand like a child. God reminded me that I could lay down my fear and inadequacy like a burden that is too heavy, so that I could grasp His hand instead. I need Jesus to lead me on the path He wants for me. I would not be fearless, but I would be full of faith and focus on God. Not strong, but dependent upon God for each step forward.

So, I'm reminding myself that if I'm obedient to what God leads me to do, success or failure is in His hands. It isn't my responsibility to achieve or garner people's respect. It is only my responsibility to obey and trust God with the results. I must rehearse this because my humanity is so distractible from the deadly duo of worry and pride.

So, when fear attacks, rehearse who you are. Rehearse *whose* you are. Remember that God is reaching out to take you by the hand (just like Peter when he was sinking) and that God never lets go. Picture God walking you into the future that He has designed for you. God's purpose for your life is always good, bigger, and more satisfying than you can pursue without Him.

In 2 Corinthians 12:9, Paul writes, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness. Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me." I need that printed on my pillowcase or posted where I see it daily. "Not

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by strength, not by power, but by my Spirit says the LORD.”

No one and nothing can defeat God. Psalm 20:4 reminds us that God answers yes when our big ASK aligns with God’s will and timing. Ask God to demonstrate who He is to the world. Ask Him to take your hand and lead you each step into His will for your life.

In Jeremiah 1:17, God says, “Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you...” WHY? Because we wind up worshipping what we fear the most. We give that thing honor, energy, and space in our hearts and minds, and it takes first place in our priorities. But we have a choice:

Fear God or fear everything else.

CHAPTER 7

**GOD'S PURPOSE
AND PLAN**

**ARE YOU SHIPWRECKED OR
SMOOTH SAILING?**

Barb Bickford

Has your life as a pastor's wife turned out like you thought it would? Or have your best-laid plans fallen by the wayside? When we first arrived at our Replant, we had many ideas for what we thought would help it flourish. We were gung-ho with fresh goals and objectives to turn this ship

around. While we achieved some goals, others met staunch resistance.

After learning how many years the church had declined (and of the weariness that years of conflict and control brought to many relationships), we thought our “fresh” perspective would be exciting– possibly even a relief. However, for many church members, it merely allowed them to dig their heels in deeper. They had fought so hard and so long to keep their church afloat and not let what they felt was important fall overboard that they lost sight of the reason they were there in the first place. True colors emerged as we challenged them with their paradigms. Some who had initially championed my husband and his chartered course for change and growth became adversaries. Some sweet older ladies I had hoped to have a deep relationship with and learn some life lessons from turned out to be not so sweet. A place I had hoped would feel like home felt more like a battlefield.

Were we wrong in the plans God laid on our hearts for this church? Something needed to change. Why would God bring us here just to beat us down and for the church to continue on a course of destruction? We had to search our hearts, seek the Lord, and often return to the drawing board. The most important thing was to keep our eyes focused on Him and not be distracted by our master plan or the devil's fiery darts.

Satan had a stronghold on that little church for so long, and nobody there knew it. It had been in such a slow decline—in numbers, yes, but even worse, a slow decline in spiritual health, that imminent death snuck up on them. What was once a vibrant, growing, God-honoring body had fallen ill due to pride, control, and a lack of putting the Lord first. When we shift from His priorities to ours, failure is inevitable.

I think it's easy to assume we know the best route for God to take in fighting our battles. We are selfish beings and rely more on ourselves than on

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God. We think we know and proceed without caution or care regarding His plan. The good news is that God CAN turn the ship around. He CAN right the wrongs. He CAN win the battles. But WE can't do it on our own. This battle is God's fight. He, and only He, is the answer to all these blunders. Our job is to trust him, continue to seek Him, and have patience and faith in his actions.

Currently, my small group from church is studying the minor prophets. In the opening chapter, Habakkuk is having a conversation with God, and he is complaining a bit. There was so much godlessness, destruction, and violence going on, and God wasn't handling it how Habakkuk thought he should. He repeatedly asks God why, and God responds in verse five. The Message phrases God's response this way: "Look around at the godless nations. Look long and hard. Brace yourself for a shock. Something's about to take place, and you're going to find it hard to believe."

There is so much freedom in this! The load is off our shoulders! We need to look around and recognize the sinful practices entrenched in our church's DNA. We must look long and hard to determine what can stay and what should go. What honors God, and what dishonors him? Then, we must put on our life jackets and hold onto the rails because God is about to take some action that we can't even imagine!

As we did in our Replant, I'm sure many of you and your husbands came into your Replant/Revitalization excited and with big plans. Think about the goals you have for your church. Think about the plans you have for your church's neighborhood. Now, step back and look at what the Lord is doing. What plans do you think He has for your church and neighborhood? Can you even comprehend it? Are you ready for it?

Jeremiah 29:11 in the CSB says, "For I know the plans I have for you - this is the LORD's declaration - plans for your well-being, not for

disaster, to give you a future and a hope.” Things can feel disastrous when we are deep in the trenches of our Replant, especially in years two and three. We can feel the waves of change dashing us against cliffs. Often, this is because we rely too much on ourselves. We do our best to work our plan instead of trusting God for His plan. He does not want us to live in despair. He wants us to look forward to our future and the future of our church with hope.

In those first years, we could never have imagined that God would turn that ship around in just a few more years (which sometimes seemed like a lifetime). It wasn't easy, and it wasn't without pain. Nearly all of the original members of that church left. Some died. Most who had come to help ended up going as well. Some of those losses were a relief; some were quite painful. But God was faithful in bringing health and growth to a place that had lacked for so long. He brought so many new and healthy shipmates hungry to be close to Him and share his love with those in our little town.

So, the next time your circumstances tempt you to feel like God isn't working in your church's life, remember that He has a plan. He may not have shared it with you yet, but He's the ship's captain. His course is steady and right on the mark. You can trust him with your life and the life of your church.

CHAPTER 8

**HOW OUR NEEDS
AND PAST PAIN CAN
BUILD IDOLS**

Joyce Jackson

A critical component of a healthy Revitalization or Replant Church is to acknowledge past success and pain and how it may have shaped the church's identity. Without this assessment, the church stumbles forward, falsely accepting that the presuppositions that brought it to this vulnerable place are correctly supporting the church.

Often, the congregation is protective of areas that could be painful if shifted. But just because

something is painful doesn't mean it is wrong. Sometimes acknowledging the pain is the key to finding freedom from the past. To protect something that does not hold spiritual value for the body of Christ sets it up as an idol.

In addition, as leaders, we must also consider where our own sticking points are. Do we protect something that doesn't serve to make us or our family healthier and closer to God?

In Jeremiah 1:17, God says, "Do not be terrified of them, or I will terrify you." Why? Because we wind up worshiping what we fear most. We give it honor, energy, and space in our hearts and minds. What we fear takes first place in our priorities. So, we fear God... or we fear everything else!

We're created with needs. We need food, shelter, rest, human connection, and a purposeful endeavor. It isn't wrong to have needs. In fact, it is a way God points us back to Himself as Jehovah Jireh, our provider.

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But you cannot fill spiritual hunger by feeding a soul's appetite. We are often out of balance because we are feeding one part of us, hoping it will quiet the other part's needs. Much like Gideon threshing wheat in a pit, churches in their turnaround journey are putting energy into things that aren't developing spiritual health.

We are created to be the temple of the Holy God; body (physical), soul (personal), and spirit (spiritual). Honor God by nurturing all of you.

We hear God best in two circumstances: when our human needs are met so we are unencumbered by our own hungers, and when we are broken and know that only God can meet our needs. This reminds me of my two grandmothers. Both grew up in the Great Depression, but they took opposite approaches to life. One grandmother believed that how you looked indicated your acceptability, whether you were worthy of respect, and even if God was happy with you. She went to great trouble to dress well and demanded that her girls perform to her unflinching

standards...so she would not be embarrassed. It was all performance and image-based living. (Churches can get caught up in this as well.)

By contrast, my other grandmother was meek and spent her life trying to keep the peace. At home, she cooked and cleaned to make people happy. She worked as a restaurant server, even once serving the Shah of Iran, who gave her a thank-you gift. She had a talent for taking care of people and making them feel special. She was a Martha, working herself to the bone but largely missing out on the heart connections that could have given her more joy. Some churches are busy with **doing**, but don't take the time needed to connect with God and each other.

Both of my grandmothers were trying to do the "right things" based on their experience, but the *things* took the place of being God's child and being loved by Him. Both were Christians, but they were spiritually bound by pain. One tried to avoid the pain of rejection and poverty by appearing put together. The other tried to avoid

pain and rejection by keeping everyone happy and fed. The “right things” they were doing became such a focus in their lives that those “right things” were idols that they blindly served. I can see how these idols developed because, at some point, their primary needs were not met. But those idols robbed them of the richer, fuller lives that they could have lived.

What we strive for, protect, and honor most; those things are the center of church life and our personal lives. If the focus shifts from pursuing God and His path through these gifts He has given, to pursuing these tasks as our primary concerns, we will fail in our purpose. Freedom is found in turning it back over to God, letting Him choose *if* He will use the ministry, or you in it, and to give Him the glory, no matter what. Remember, Gideon’s army was trimmed down beyond all human reason before the battle. Why? So, God could do what only God could do.

Our purpose is to know Him and to make Him known.

CHAPTER 9

LIAR, LIAR, PANTS ON FIRE!

Kathy Addis

“This includes you, who were once far away from God. You were His enemies, separated from Him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now He has reconciled you to Himself through the death of Christ in His physical body. As a result, He has brought you into His own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before Him without a single fault.”

Colossians 1:21-22

These verses were part of my quiet time recently. I know I have read this scripture many times in the past, but for some reason, it hit me with fresh awe this time. They caused me to remember. I remember who I was before Jesus rescued me. I remember the scared and scarred young lady who had no hope and was not certain of a future.

I was reminded of my previous way of living as well. I lived in such a way as to survive only. From the outside, I would assume my life seemed pretty normal. I wasn't homeless, though I felt as though I had no place to go. I didn't use drugs, but I had plenty of other methods of finding an escape from reality. I smiled and laughed on the outside while hiding resentment, hate, and desperation on the inside. I had learned a valuable lesson on how to live life on my own....Just lie.

It was seldom that I would be bold in lying to someone's face. No, for me, lies were more about manipulation or exaggeration. That seemed to come so naturally, and I thought people really believed me, so then I had to keep it up. I could

never admit that what I had said wasn't exactly true; my fragile self-esteem could never handle such a thing. After all, I had an image to maintain. One little crack in my façade and I was in serious danger of people finding out just how broken I really was, and that would never do.

By the time I was in my late teens, I had worked so hard at pretending I was what I thought people wanted me to be that I actually lost track of who I really was. I was okay with that. The real me was a hot mess, and I was plenty ok with trying to bury her in the fictional life I had created. Sure, I had very little integrity and virtually no character, but because of all the things I DIDN'T do, I felt shallow but justified. I was living as an enemy of God, though I never would have thought so. Little did I know my delicate house of cards was just one interaction away from complete destruction.

On July 26, 1991, I was radically rescued by my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In one brief but powerfully honest prayer, He stripped me of my lies and brokenness and gave me a new

heart, hope, and freedom. For the first time as an adult, I was completely and totally honest with Him. No candy coating, no manipulation, no beating around the bush. Just raw, real honesty. I remember how good it felt to no longer have the weight of guilt and shame crushing me. I was free to hope and to start over with a new life in Christ, even though I had yet to understand what that meant.

By God's grace and mercy, He has taught me so much about what it means to be holy (set apart for Him), blameless and without fault (unaccused, free from all charges). I am far from perfect, but these verses remind me that I am reconciled to God my Father through the death of Christ in His physical body. Because He has brought me into His presence, I am compelled to live my life for Him. I fail miserably daily, and in my own strength, wisdom, or intellect, I will never reach the bar He has set, but I know that I want to try. I want to move out of His way so that He will have free rein in my life.

CHAPTER 10

GOD DOESN'T NEED PERFECT PEOPLE

Erin Cofield

One Sunday, shortly after I was saved, a woman I loved and respected at church asked me to do her a favor. I would have done anything Ms. Wanda asked because she was a huge blessing. She could have said, “Can I have a kidney?” And I would’ve said, “Of course! I can live with one, so I have an extra!” If she had said, “Can you give me \$100?” I would’ve gladly opened my purse and handed her my grocery money for the week. But when she said, “Can you teach my Sunday School class in a couple of weeks?” I was absolutely stunned. I was

a “newbie” Christian, with barely any biblical knowledge to speak of, and beyond that, I knew something she didn’t realize... I wasn’t a good person with a good past.

I agreed more out of respect for her than any desire to teach Sunday School. How bad could it be, I thought. I studied the material and prepared myself to teach what I assumed would be a small class of ladies. I hoped they were new Christians, too, and wouldn’t be able to find any mistakes in my “rookie Christian” theology.

But when I walked into her classroom that Sunday, I realized her class wasn’t just any ordinary “Ladies’ Sunday School” class. Her class was almost entirely comprised of older women whose husbands were all either retired pastors or actively serving deacons and elders. These women had *forgotten* more of the Bible than I could ever hope to know. And these were “good people.” These women were saintly. They were sweet and kind. They smelled like powder, and their hair, nails, and clothes were perfect. In

comparison, I was a mess. I had three kids under five years old, and nothing about me was perfect—in fact, that morning, we had all shoved frozen waffles in our mouths, rushed out the door, and yelled at my 5-year-old in the parking lot as we came into the church. I almost walked right back out of that classroom.

After Ms. Wanda introduced me, I began the lesson. And those perfect, incredible women listened to every word of my imperfect and flawed study. And afterward, Ms. Wanda, this beautiful woman I admired, respected, and loved, said something amazing: “You are a born teacher. The Lord is going to use you for this purpose.” Again, I was stunned. “No, ma’am,” I said. “You don’t know this, but I’m not like that. I have a past. God can’t use me. I’m happy He saved me, but I’m not meant to be used by Him.” Ms. Wanda laughed and said, “You’ll be so surprised. God has a plan for you.”

Over the next couple of years, Ms. Wanda encouraged me to lead a Mothers of Preschoolers

group, teach in the youth, and even teach her class a few more times. Ms. Wanda saw something in me I had never seen in myself. Yes, she recognized a teacher... But she also saw someone that God could use.

When I think about God using unlikely people, the story of Rahab comes to my mind. Talk about an unlikely person for the Lord to include in a massive plot point in the Bible! As a quick refresher, here's Rahab's story: In Joshua 2, Joshua sends two men as spies to view the land of Jericho, which was the next city for the Israelites to conquer as they claimed the Promised Land. The two men come to the home of a prostitute (Rahab), whose house is part of the city walls, and they lodge there. When people report their presence to the King of Jericho, he tells Rahab to send the men out. Rahab, however, makes a pact with the men that she will hide them on her roof in exchange for her family's safety during Israel's siege of Jericho. She lies to the King and tells him the men were there but had already left. She then instructs the King's men to

pursue the men and shut the gate behind them. She confesses her fear to the spies after hearing the reports of the Lord's deliverance of the Israelites at the Red Sea and other regions. She confirms her belief that "the Lord has given you the land" and "the Lord your God is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath" (Josh. 2:9-11, ESV). Rahab then helps the men escape from her home by lowering them down with a rope.

Rahab was not an elite Israelite. She was a Gentile and, perhaps even more shocking, a prostitute. She was uneducated in Jewish laws, religions, and customs. She did not obey the Covenant between the Lord and His people and could not earn the Lord's favor through covenant commandments. But the Lord was intent on using her for His purpose. Not because of what she had done but because of her faith in Him.

To truly understand the part Rahab plays in a larger redemptive story, it is helpful to go to Matthew 1 and read the genealogy of Jesus

Christ. Rahab is mentioned there as the wife of Salmon, the father of Boaz, and “Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.” (Matt.1:5-6, ESV) Joshua 6:25 reports, “But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day because she hid the messengers Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.”

While living in Israel, Rahab married Salmon and became King David's great-great-grandmother. But that is not where the story ends— Rahab is also in the genealogy of Jesus Christ, God's ultimate Redemption for all humanity, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Rahab's willingness to put herself in danger to hide the Israelite spies had a far-reaching impact that continues to affect Christians today. Not only did she assist the spies, allowing them to escape and report back to Joshua to prepare for the siege, but her obedience to the Lord's leading gave mankind a way to escape Hell and separation from God.

Regardless of your background and what you have done, the Lord intends to use you. Rahab was a pagan prostitute, but when the Lord rescued her from the siege, He didn't leave her as she was. She married Salmon and is not only a close relative of King David but also an ancestor of Jesus. The writer of Hebrews lists her in the Hall of Faith right after mentioning the Patriarchs and the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. "By faith, Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies" (Heb. 11:31, ESV). Despite personal peril, she is celebrated for her faithfulness to the Lord because the Lord redeemed her life and used her testimony for His ultimate plan and purpose. He can do the same with anyone. Your past does not define your future.

In Church Renewal, it can be easy to feel inadequate. (Indeed, on occasion, some people will intentionally make you feel that way.) But the Lord isn't interested in using only perfect people.

He intends to use you for His purpose and glory, and here's the good news... That has nothing to do with YOU. Your ability, your intelligence, and your perfection are not necessary for Him to perform a miracle in your church. I wasn't adequate to teach those ladies in that Sunday School class. But the Lord was!

My past isn't nice and clean. For that matter, sometimes my present is a little messy, too. I'm not perfect. I bet you aren't either. But that's OK. God doesn't require your perfection. He just wants your faithfulness. Let go of your expectation of perfection and allow God to use your whole self for His plan and His purpose. You're perfect for what He has planned.

CHAPTER 11

**DEALING WITH
SEASONS OF
BROKENNESS**

Joyce Jackson

Have you been through a life-hurricane? A time when the pressure was immense, and ongoing, and the future was uncertain. A time when the outcomes were not going to be good, no matter what.

A good friend of our family, Tom Stolle, the Executive Director of the Maryland/Delaware

State Convention, shared this in a sermon. His life was off to a good start; he had a good education, a good job, three sons, and a beautiful wife. Life was good. Then, within a very short amount of time, his mother was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer, his youngest son was diagnosed with severe autism, and his oldest son was in a car accident and doctors weren't sure he would walk again. He said, "I felt like I was shot, rolled into a ditch, and left for dead." Where was the God whom he was serving?

Sometimes, when we desperately need God's healing and help the most, we find ourselves crippled instead. Genesis 32:24 says, "Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the breaking of day." After wrestling all night, the Man (God) said to let go. Jacob said in verse 26, "I will not let you go until you bless me!" and God responded, "What is your name?" The name "Jacob" means supplanter, or one who seizes. God renamed him Israel, meaning "God perseveres." Then Jacob asked, "Tell me your name, I pray." And He said, "Why is it that you

ask about my name?” And He blessed him there. I think we are left out of a conversation between Jacob’s question and the blessing. I think there was some personal discipling that happened there. Jacob had received a stolen blessing in the past. I wonder if he wasn’t trying to get out from under the shadow of that old burden of a blessing by begging for a new one.

Jacob wrestled with God, asked for a blessing, and was left with a new name, a new identity, a new story, a blessing, and a limp. Midnight wrestling is a strange way to get Jacob’s attention. Even stranger, Jacob leaves with a blessing, but he also leaves with a limp. Have you been left with a limp? Some area in your life where you feel less than, a great loss, incapable, maybe even unloved. If Jacob had simply received a heavenly visit and blessing, he would have leaned into the blessing and his own strength as he continued in life. Instead, it was impossible to lean on his own strength. It was impossible to forget that night. But he had the blessing. It’s because of the blessing that we are learning from him even

today. The blessing is about what God does, regardless of the human condition. A limp, a drought, an army, a sickness, when the numbers and forecasts are not in our favor, we have God. God has all power, all authority, and all eternity in His hands.

My family lost my brother as he was crossing the street and was hit by a car. That was horrible enough, but it unleashed a torrent of painful events. Then COVID hit, and we lost four more family members. I have to admit, I did a spiritual duck and cover. I became afraid to pray with any depth because God kept saying no. I read my Bible with fear that each page could hold some new, painful message. My belief in God was solid, but my belief that He would spare us pain was shattered. It was like falling down a rocky cliff and being unable to stop the descent.

My heart had to set to work rebuilding life on a social/emotional level. Loss is disorienting because we have to rebuild our lives on the outside as well as on the inside. It isn't that our

loved ones are no longer a part of our emotional life; in some ways, we hold them more solidly and intensely than we did before. But my daily life must be done with different connections and supports than before. My family still doesn't have sufficient answers. But we have Jesus. Jesus is that lighthouse in the storm when you can't see the shoreline. You can choose to use the light you see to guide you to the shore and the hope that you don't see.

One of my favorite C.S. Lewis quotes is from Mere Christianity. "Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing, and so you are not surprised. But presently, He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of - throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra

floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage, but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.”

I wish I had a pithy program for those times when the storm rages and the boat is sinking and the lighthouse is blacked out. But there are times when God just wants us to cling to Him. This broken world is temporary. I feel so sad for those who have had real soul-wrenching tragedy and turn away from God. We don't always get the answers that we want. Sometimes, we don't get answers at all. But to let go of the only hope that can carry us beyond this life, to turn off the light because the night is dark, is tragic. It is saying if my finite mind can't figure this out, I refuse to consider that there is more than I can understand. Or worse, if God doesn't do what I want Him to, I refuse to acknowledge Him.

The most beautiful people I have known are the ones who have suffered most, yet still rest in the

THE LORD MEANT IT FOR GOOD

hope that God is love. God allows our souls to be sifted, gold in the furnace to forge out the impurities. Remember how Jacob refused to let go until he received a blessing. Cling to God, receive a blessing, a new identity, and a limp, so that not one step can be taken without a reminder that God is faithful and that He is good.

CHAPTER 12

THE WILDERNESS OF GRIEF

Barb Bickford

*"My eyes are worn out from weeping; I am
churning within. My heart is poured out in grief."*

Lamentations 2:11a.

Grief will sneak up on you. One minute, it's not there at all, and the next minute, it is in full force. Grief is hard and painful. It hurts in your chest, like a weight that sits on top of you, making you feel like you are struggling to breathe. You feel it in your stomach, like the worst kind of nerves.

THE LORD MEANT IT FOR GOOD

You even feel it in your limbs, a heaviness that feels like you are trudging through quicksand.

I'm thankful that God is with us in the wilderness of grief. He doesn't leave us wandering through it alone. He goes before us, comes behind us, and walks beside us. This knowledge brings peace in my head, but I still feel the weight and pain of it in my heart. I've been learning how to walk through this wilderness of grief with him while balancing the joy my relationship with him brings.

Like me, many of you may be experiencing grief now that the holidays are over. Sure, you felt it during the holidays, but sometimes, the aftermath is worse: Deeper somehow... sneaking up out of nowhere, and feeling like it will never go away. While others are planning all the new things they will begin and charging forward with renewed purpose, some of us are struggling to avoid being dragged down into the pit of despair.

Sometimes, I just want to ignore it. I want it to disappear, so I try to distract myself with meaningless tasks or even over-productivity. Some days I don't want to talk about it because I haven't cried that day. On other days, I may feel productive, and I don't want that to come to a screeching halt. Sometimes, I do want to talk about it, but I just want someone to understand rather than feel sorry for me or not get it at all. Such a range of emotions. Mostly, I feel like I can just pretend it isn't there, and then it won't be.

But that just isn't how grief works— it lingers. It is persistent. Pushing it aside or attempting to ignore it isn't good for us. Instead, I know that it's better to talk about it and name it for what it is. When we name it, it's not as easy to ignore. It forces us to deal with the grief. Keeping it in the forefront also requires that we seek what God has for us in this.

When we think of grief, we often think of death-- but sometimes, we aren't grieving the loss of a person so much as the loss of a dream, a future,

or an idea of what our life would be like. What is it for you? What is the "grief" you are experiencing? Is it the death of a family member or friend? Is it a chronic or terminal illness? Is it homelessness or job loss? Are you experiencing disunity in your family or the loss of a close relationship? Maybe it is war or conflict. Or you may be dealing with the loss of a child or parent due to estrangement. Whatever your personal grief is, name it! Call it out. And then give it to Jesus.

Jesus says for us to come to him when we are weighed down with burdens. Matthew 11:28 says, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." He says to cast our cares on him because he cares about us. (1 Peter 5:7) Rest here. Rest with him. Rest in him. Find comfort in his arms. He calls us to let go of our grief and hand it over to him. Give it all to him, every little bit. Trust him with it. We can't solve it anyway. Only he can do that. Hanging onto it only prolongs our hardship. This is not to say this is easy or "one-and-done." It is an

ongoing process. Sometimes, we have to give it to Him again and again, every day, every hour, even every minute.

There's an old hymn written by Annie Sherwood Hawks called I Need Thee Every Hour. It's based on Psalm 22:19, which says, "But you, Lord, don't be far away. My strength, come quickly to help me." Check out the first verse and chorus:

I need thee every hour
Most gracious Lord
No tender voice like thine
Can peace afford
I need thee oh I need thee
Every hour I need thee
Oh bless me now my savior
I come to thee

When we recognize how much we need the Lord, remember how gracious he is, and then come humbly to him, we gain a posture that is open to relinquishing our pain and sorrow. I admit that hanging on to grief can feel good in a way— like, somehow, it makes us feel closer to the person or

relationship we are grieving. But that's not accurate. When we give it fully over to Jesus, he can do a redemptive work in our hearts. It is such a great opportunity to draw near to him, to allow him to repair the hurt, to rebuild the broken parts, and to restore an accurate view of what our relationship with the Father looks like.

God provides so many opportunities for healing as we walk through this wilderness. When you are feeling bogged down by grief, don't hide it, and don't hang on to it. Share it with a trusted friend. Breathe deep. Drink a cold glass of water. Count. Look for the sunshine. Literally, go outside and put your face in the sun. Soak it in. Look for the beautiful things. Listen to the birds and music, and little children laughing. Sing! And let yourself cry. Let it out. Scream if you have to.

But most importantly, turn to the Lord. Remember his goodness. Think specifically about the ways he has been good to you. Remember his promises - promises made and promises fulfilled. Be thankful for his presence and even this

sanctification that He is leading you through. How has he blessed you? Name the ways. It's helpful to me to take the time to do these practical things. They always draw me back to him. He created us in such a way as to be healed in his presence and in his creation.

During this particular season of grief, I have seen God's hand moving in my life. I have learned some things about myself and my relationship with him. As much as I'd rather not be experiencing this, I am thankful for it because of how it has brought me closer to the Lord. What are you learning? Grief is an avenue for learning. We can learn new things about ourselves, and we can learn more things about God. How can you help others? Grief is an opportunity to help and serve. Are there women in your church who might be struggling in the wilderness of grief? How might you help them? You don't have to be "done" or "through" with your grief in order to help them. God uses us in the midst of our brokenness. Grief is also a form of suffering. I believe God allows us to experience suffering so that we can

grow closer to him and so that we can help and serve others who are also suffering.

One of my favorite authors is Nancy Guthrie. In a podcast interview with Russell Moore, she said this: “Our suffering is not the end of the story. Our suffering in this life will give way to great glory. There is glory in the future for all who are willing to suffer for Him in the present; that’s going to far outweigh the suffering in the present. We will be grateful for the grace he gave us to endure the suffering. That’s his promise in the suffering— ‘My grace is sufficient.’” This was so encouraging to me. This pain, excruciating as it is at times, is not for nothing. God can and will use it for our good and his glory. He can redeem all things. Let’s embrace his sufficient grace, friends.

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more because the previous things have passed away.” Revelation 21:4

CHAPTER 13

**PREVENTING
ETHICAL FAILURE:**

**THE BATHSHEBA
SYNDROME**

Joyce Jackson

If you thought this blog would be about blaming Bathsheba and letting David off the hook, let me assure you: The BIG reveal here is that it's not really about the woman. It is about a heart conditioned by success that permits lies to take

root. King David would not have been swayed by more wealth, power, and victories. But the man who had his first bride taken and given to another, the man who was scoffed at by his wife... Well, **that** man would be vulnerable to having his ego fed by a beautiful woman. As leaders, we can and will be tempted by the things that feed our vulnerabilities. If God is not speaking our identity over us with love, we are all vulnerable to the lies of distraction.

The Father of Lies (Satan) started long before the Garden of Eden, talking 1/3 of heaven's population into going with him into rebellion. Then, once in the Garden, he lied, "Did God really say you can't do this? Oh, good grief, that's not true. To die!?! How dramatic! I mean, God made it; God made you to want it. It's just that if you have this experience, you will be fulfilled. You will see things for what they are! You are so deserving of this fuller experience; instead of doing without and always wondering... go ahead, take a little bite." (Just as a reminder, in case you just jumped

in at this point- we were playing the devil's role, not advocating for it.)

In 2 Chronicles 32, we see Hezekiah, a remarkably godly leader. He reinforced the city walls when the King of Assyria came to wage war and encouraged the people, saying, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria and the vast army with him, for there is a greater power with us than with him. With him is only the arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God to help us fight our battles.” When Sennacherib sent a threatening letter, Hezekiah spread it before God in the temple. And God's angel took out the Assyrian army.

Hezekiah also experienced a deadly illness and healing with the miracle of the sun moving backward. But then 2 Chronicles 32:31 reveals the hard methods of God. Verse 31 says, “But when envoys were sent by the rulers of Babylon to ask him about the miraculous sign that had occurred in the land, God left him to test him and to know

everything that was in his heart.” Hezekiah’s pride led him astray, resulting in his nation and his family being carried off to Babylon.

So, the BIG question God asks each of us is this: “When life is ***difficult beyond your capacity***, am I still your God? Am I still the one true, loving, holy, all-powerful, merciful, and Almighty God to you? Will you honor me in the pain?” He also asks, “When life is ***blessed beyond your capacity***, am I still your God? Am I still the one true, loving, holy, all-powerful, merciful, and Almighty God to you? Will you honor me in the blessing?”

We should be terrified of 2 Chronicles 32:31. “God left him to test him and to know everything that was in his heart.” If we are too confident, thinking that we won’t slip, we won’t cling to God with intentionality and intensity. If we think we are favored by God and therefore entitled to a protected life, we have missed the truth of this world’s spiritual condition and our own place in God’s plan for this very temporary assignment.

The Bathsheba Syndrome happens when a leader experiences the accolades, the perks, and the frustrations of knowing much has been accomplished by their hand... but they are under so much scrutiny that they welcome a distraction from the pressure. A new song, a new vineyard, a new sword, a new experience, a new car, or a new person all promise fulfillment and release from stress.

There are conditions, when paired with success, that open the door for the Bathsheba Syndrome. Think of these like the weather conditions that increase the likelihood of tornadoes. The more conditions present, or the stronger the conditions, the higher the likelihood of precipitating tornadoes in the weather of life.

We need to ask what lie is at the center of each of these "conditions":

1. **Corporate: Loss of strategic focus** [Lie: *My personal preference or agenda must be sanctioned by God if I'm in this position, much like history's manifest destiny.*] Passion must be focused toward purpose. And that purpose must

be anchored in the Great Commission, to know God and to make Him known.

2. Personal: Privileged Access [Lie: *Only a few of us need to know the details.*] Unique access is essential to develop a comprehensive strategic vision. However, leaders with elevated access can enter an echo chamber where the only people who speak into their lives are those who say what they know leaders want to hear. Protective layers develop around the leaders and the processes necessary for the ministry to function. Activity becomes siloed, processes become secret, and eventually, there is no accountability to keep the leader safe from manipulation or self-destruction. Record decisions and actions so that the printed word keeps the ministry process honest and those involved accountable for their positive and negative actions. The Hawthorne Effect reminds us that knowing there will be an observable written record refines activity.

3. Corporate: Control of Resources [Lie: *Because I understand the ministry processes best, I should control the resources.*] Again,

resources need to be appropriately, not frivolously, invested. There should be a plan and a responsible party to purchase and monitor the use of resources. There should be accountability so that one person or a small group does not create havoc by holding the purse strings and halting ministry. However, the pastor should keep others between himself and the income and outflow of financials and their information. There should be additional oversight of those individuals as well. The old adage is true: Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The pastor needs input and spiritual authority to speak to priorities, but if control is stacked on as well, it's a recipe for trouble. Even if the ministry leader doesn't make a mistake, an accusation of heavy-handed control can damage the ministry.

4. Personal: Inflated Belief in the Ability to Manipulate or Control Outcomes [Lie: *I've got this.*] When one's influence grows to the point of "trust without verifying," or if someone has been able to bully long enough that no one wants to question them, they become the final authority. Not God. I can think of two situations where a

person made things uncomfortable enough for the majority of the church to leave so that there was no voting quorum remaining, so there was no way to make adjustments according to church bylaws.

How do we avoid these conditions as leaders?

* **Fasting:** Get away from all the perks and power plays. Otherwise, they become blinders, so you can't see beyond their effect on your life. Fasting reconditions the spirit and mind to choose healthy responses for each condition.

* **Prayer:** Only God can tell you what you need to know; everyone else makes educated guesses.

* **Prioritize a Sabbath:** Practice regular unplugging, sabbatical refreshing, and reassessing with a godly accountability partner who does not depend upon your approval for their job or status.

* **Accountability/Advising:** Reassess your heart for sinful attitudes and actions. Let others breathe truth and insight into your personal life. If we try to cover our sins, they become a

testimony against us before God. Temptation is a call for an accountability partner. Let others ask the hard questions; do not be defensive, but take time to consider, confess, and repent. Even if it is in blindness, over-busyness, or exhaustion, let God know where you think you missed the mark. When God covers our sins, He atones for them all. There is freedom in confession. Seek solutions for the future to walk on a healthier path.

*** Confess that you are not the center:** Tell someone with spiritual maturity about your heart's hopes and desires, and allow them to reflect the truth back to you. Do this in Ministry life as well, but not necessarily with the same people.

God reminds us in Hebrews 4:16: "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." In this verse, we tend to focus on the words "confidence," "mercy," and "grace." These promises are profound. But that word "help" is *boetheia*, which is a picture word of *frapping* a ship with chains or ropes. Frapping

is wrapping it, binding it together so it doesn't fall apart in a storm.

For us, when life is good because God has blessed us, we need to wrap praise around our lives to acknowledge His blessing. And when life is hard because God has pulled back a little on his majestic, protective power and allowed pain to test us and refine us as only pain can do, we need to wrap words of honor for God around our lives. God is eternal, and our troubles are not.

The Bathsheba Syndrome, also known as the "I'm so special that the rules don't apply to me" mental miscalculation, is a test that comes in different forms to all of us. Our defense is humility in Christ and honoring His name. Only God can give us fulfilled hearts and release us from pressure and stress when we give it all back to him. He wants the accolades, he wants the heart cries, and all of our hopes and fears. Only HE is big enough to carry it. We just get to stand by.

CHAPTER 14

THE POWER OF PRAYER

Joyce Jackson

Nothing is more critical than prayer, especially in church renewal. When we pray for our churches, we are in a spiritual battle. It can feel like we may want to stop praying, and we may wonder if it is even effective. But we **MUST** pray because we **NEED** to pray.

We need prayer to help us understand God's word accurately. God's word is spiritual truth, and it is made alive in us as God gives it illumination in our spirit, through the Spirit. For some reason,

my mind paints this unreasonable picture of prayer. I have images of cloistered, long-winded, poetry-laden speeches, probably inspired by “The Sound of Music.” That imagery is a lie. It discourages me from praying because my prayers don’t measure up. It tells me those arrow prayers I shoot up to God in the middle of the night or when I randomly think of a friend aren’t sufficient to get His attention.

Maybe you've heard of the ACTS prayer acronym: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. We begin with adoration because this is the only way to properly and honestly address God. He is God, I am thankful, hopeful, and humble before Him. Then we need to clear any barriers between us and God by confessing and asking for restoration from sins we know and sins we are not aware of. We continue by thanking God for His promises to provide our restoration by the sacrifice of His son and for all of the blessings that flow from that. Then we bring other supplication requests; He already knows these better than we do, but for some reason, we are

commanded to ask. It is as if prayer is the key to spiritually unlocking God's action. Does God release more angels into spiritual battle? Is God waiting for our hearts to be in the right condition to receive blessings and keep our focus on Him? Does praying rehab my spirit in a way nothing else can? Prayer definitely removes barriers in all of those ways.

Let's look at the prayers of the Bible. Job suffered a heartbreaking loss. But when the Lord answered his prayer, he was told, "You have no concept of who I AM."

Elijah prayed bold prayers that drove out Baal's followers, but terror overtook him, and he ran from Jezebel. Aaron offers a priestly blessing in his prayer: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace." (Numbers 6:25-26) In Psalm 23, we read David's prayer, or "The Shepherd's Prayer": "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no

evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

(Psalm 23:4–6) Paul said a prayer for the church in Ephesus: "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:14–21)

If Job, Elijah, Aaron, David, and Paul leaned on prayer for the church, we should, too. We can't do less; we can't do more. All of these prayers did not

change the person praying except to make them more humble and more open to what God was doing. But all of these prayers opened the doors of heaven to bring God's purposes to pass.

Nothing quickens the death of a church like being so wrapped up in its own concerns that it forgets to pray for others. By contrast, nothing brings a church back to life quicker than stoking a fire of faith when they participate in missions beyond their local area. We are responsible for praying for our suffering Christian brothers and sisters. More believers are killed for their faith in Nigeria each year than everywhere else in the world combined. An estimated 7,000 Christians were targeted and killed last year alone. We need to pray for Christians in Nigeria and for Christians and missionaries in other nations so that they can spread the gospel and enhance lives, so that more doors are open.

Prayer isn't something that just happens-- we must create time, space, and opportunity for it.

Create a plan for yourself and the church to operate in the spiritual battle through prayer.

But I Don't Know How to Pray

Kathy Addis

A quick Google search finds that dictionary.com defines prayer as “a spiritual communion with God or an object of worship.” Exodus 32:11 says, “Moses implored the Lord his God.” In 1 Samuel 1:15, we read that Hannah “pour[s] out [her] soul before the Lord.” One more example in 2 Chronicles 32:20 tells that Hezekiah, the king, and Isaiah the prophet “cried to heaven.”

I love how eloquently scripture describes prayer. I, however, am a simple girl and describe it simply as “having a conversation with God.”

Prayer is our first step in our walk with Jesus. It is how we invite Him into our lives and let Him take over. It is how we tell Him how much we love and need Him. Prayer is one of the fundamental

basics of being a Christian, along with Bible study and fellowship.

And yet, I hear sweet Christians who have given their heart to Jesus say they don't know how to pray. I kind of find this baffling, and here's why: Jesus *tells* us how to pray. In fact, He says in Matthew 6:9 (NLT), "Pray like this..." He goes on to give us the basic outline of prayer:

"Our Father in heaven,
may Your name be kept holy.
May Your Kingdom come soon.
May Your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who
sin against us.
And don't let us yield to temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one."

Jesus gives us the ACTUAL words to say when we don't have our own! Of course, we need to mean the words when we say them, but it is literally

spelled out for us. These are some of the first verses in scripture I was encouraged to memorize when I first accepted Jesus, and I am so thankful I did! I have said these words back to Jesus so many times when my own words were utterly weak and scrambled in my head and heart. They are such a beautiful example of adoration (vs. 9), submission (vs. 10-11), confession (vs. 12), and protection (vs. 13). I know there are other ways to interpret His words, but this is how I use His perfect prayer as an outline for my own.

I believe wholeheartedly that our enemy, the devil, tries to convince us that we have to have an articulate, flawless oration using multi-syllabic expressions heralded to our heavenly Father to somehow impress Him enough to listen to us. That could not be further from the truth!

The Bible tells us over and over that He requires honesty from us. David cries out in Psalm 51:17, “The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.”

His words were not pretty; they were real, raw, and honest before a God that took him just as he was. That same perfect God does the same for us today. David also says in that same prayer: “Unseal my lips, O Lord, that my mouth may praise you.” (Psalm 51:15)

Praise, when directed to and for our heavenly Father, is in fact a prayer. If you can sing a praise song, you can pray!

I know full well the pressure that the enemy makes sure we feel when we pray aloud. That is not to be discounted or taken lightly. You see, he wants us to think that our conversation with the Father is to be either critiqued or applauded by those who may also hear it.

This is a trap.

“Real” prayer is an intimate dialogue between us and our Creator. Very often, we are called to talk to Him on behalf of others in a very public way, and this pressure can cause us to be disingenuous or, simply put, fake. We start to string words

together that make us sound either smart or holy, and if we are lucky, both. Everyone walks away thinking they we are great at praying and they will never pray in front of us again.

The devil won that round.

Make no mistake, the Father hears us when we pray, no matter our words. He peers through the façade of pretty words and sees our heart. He knows if we are trying to impress Him or those around us. If we can come to a place of being able to talk as openly and freely with our God as we do with our spouse or friends, knowing the Holy Spirit intercedes for us when our words just won't come, then I think we can experience a walk with Him like never before. The devil will hold no influence over how we cry out to the One who knows and loves us perfectly. Now, go talk to Jesus. He's waiting to hear from you.

CHAPTER 15

FINDING A JOY- FILLED HEART

Jeanette Pugh

When serving in ministry felt similar to an undesirable job, I realized I had come to a point where I had lost my joy in serving. In fact, many times, I served stubbornly. One Saturday morning, my alarm rang out loudly. I woke up disgruntled, snatched the covers back, and sat up on the side of my bed with my hands crossed and lips poked out, complaining that this was the one day that I normally sleep in, but I had to help with an event at church. The Holy Spirit spoke to me clearly, as if he sat across the room. “I don't want you to serve like this. After your tantrums, you

can put on that fake smile for others, but I know your heart.” Right then, God revealed to me that He wasn't pleased with my behavior. I knew I shouldn't feel this way when it came to ministry. Everyone should be happy to serve, right? Why did I feel this way? Because I lost the joy in my heart to serve.

Serving in ministry should not be a burden. It should be an honor to serve God and the people of God. Our lives are so busy that when it's time to serve, we have very little energy to give. When the joy and excitement are depleted, we then use our reserve tank to minister, causing us to either rush, be inattentive, or complain when it's time to serve. God chose to use you to be a replant pastor's wife. To be the woman by his side, to hold his heart in your hands. You have a responsibility to represent Christ well by serving with joy.

John 15:4 NKJV says, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me." There are three ways we can abide

in Christ. One, we must have daily devotion. Spending time with God in His word will fill your heart with tidbits of joy day by day. You will look forward to having that time with God. If you don't know where to start, use resources such as books and apps with reminders on all sorts of topics. The great thing is that you can choose the place and amount of time to spend with Jesus. He will meet you there. Next, pray often. The Bible tells us in scripture to pray without ceasing. He hears you, knows your thoughts, and wants to commune with you. We knew that the church building needed a new heating & cooling system, but it would cost over \$100k to replace. We asked the church members to begin to pray with us. May I inform you that at that time, we had nine active members? But within months, with the help of just three donors, we had enough money to get it replaced. Prayer works! And last, be obedient to God's word. Do you recall a time when you stayed on the course, responded in a way that Christ would, or turned gossip into a prayer? God was glorified! He is pleased with our obedience. Yielding to the Holy Spirit comes with growth.

THE LORD MEANT IT FOR GOOD

The world can strip you of your joy with guilt and shame if you're not abiding by God's word.

1 Peter 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." Be confident in who you are and who God created you to be. God chose YOU! You are special to Him. God called you out of darkness into His marvelous light for you to walk in your purpose!

For years, I did not know my purpose. It only got worse after becoming a Pastor's wife. I was told by other pastors' wives that I'd have to lead the women's ministry. But what if my gift is prayer, children's ministry, or music? Don't allow others to dictate your calling or purpose. Not being confident in who God created you to be is saying Lord, I don't trust you. If you know your purpose, you will find joy in fulfilling it.

Exodus 20:17 NKJV says, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's."

Have you ever been content with what you had until you saw what someone else had? One evening, after finishing up a weekly women's study with about 15 women in attendance, I decided to get in a little screen time. As I scrolled on social media, I came across a stadium-like church with all the theatrics and thousands of women in attendance. Wow, that's amazing! I thought for just a moment about how I only had 15 women in class that day. We can look at what's going on in another church, what is happening in another woman's life, and what other people's children are doing, and start to compare it with what's happening in our lives, and BAM! Comparison just killed your Joy. Hebrews 13:5 NKJV says, "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave

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you nor forsake you." God says I'm right here with you, whether you have 15 women or 1500. Appreciate what God has for you at the moment. Contentment brings gratefulness. Be satisfied with one thing: Jesus!

CHAPTER 16

WHAT MAKES A GOOD PASTOR WIFE?

Darlene Dryer

What makes a good pastor's wife? Let me give you all the answers! I'm just kidding—I actually have no idea!

When I was in Jacksonville, I surveyed the wives of pastors in the area and asked them about their number one concern. Their primary cause of apprehension was feeling ill-equipped to do the

job people expected them to do. But what is really expected of them (and us)? That was the first problem; they were unsure what they were supposed to do and just knew they were doing it wrong.

This is a recipe for anxiety! Any time we are trying to control something we cannot control, we experience a lose-lose situation! And if we don't know what the expectation of a pastor's wife is, we may find ourselves filling that with our own expectations based on our fears and anxieties or projecting an expectation onto ourselves that may not even be biblical.

So what is expected of us?

When we look for biblical answers about the expectations of a Pastor's Wife, we have to begin with the calling of Christian women in general.

According to Scripture, any married woman of the church must submit to the Lord and her husband (Ephesians 5:22-24): "Wives, submit to

your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands." Also, married Christian women should please their husbands (1 Corinthians 7:34): "A woman who is no longer married or has never been married can be devoted to the Lord and holy in body and in spirit. But a married woman has to think about her earthly responsibilities and how to please her husband." In addition, she should adorn the inner person of the heart (1 Peter 3:1-4): "Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry or the clothing you wear, but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious." Women

should also be reverent (Titus 2:3): "Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine." They should help teach younger women (Titus 2:4): "They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children." They should have self-control (Titus 2:5): "To be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled." Women should build their house (Proverbs 14:1): "The wisest of women builds her house, but folly with her own hands tears it down," and be their husband's helper (Genesis 2:18): "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.'"

So those are the biblical qualifications of ANY married woman. But what about those of the pastor's wife? Paul lays out qualifications for wives of church officers and lists these specific terms: She should be respectful, not gossip, level-headed, and a practicing believer (1 Timothy

3:11): "Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things."

She should be a believer (1 Corinthians 9:3-5): "This is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?"

As we look at these additional qualifications, we can recognize that there is not much difference between being a married Christian woman within the church and being a Pastor's Wife! Phew! That should take a load off!

It is also important to remember that "Pastor's Wife" is not a church office! To do what the Lord has called us to do, we need to remember what He calls us to as Christian women and not adhere to expectations that are not the Lord's! In reality, our role is not much different from any other role in the church.

Now, we have to do some self-reflection and see if what we are doing is really out of obedience to the Lord's calling or out of obligation to what other people (or ourselves) expect of us. We can be released from the bondage of pantyhose, playing the piano, or even running the women's ministry! Be obedient to your biblical obligations and learn the art of politely declining the many opportunities that distract you from doing what the Lord has called you to do. Do that, and do it with all your heart!

CHAPTER 17

**WHAT I WISH I'D
KNOWN AS A
REPLANT PASTOR'S
WIFE**

Erin Cofield

When I met my husband, we were both just kids in high school, and when we married at 17 years old, neither of us was involved in ministry in any way—we weren't even Christians! I didn't grow up in a pastor's home, and I didn't have any pastor-wife friends until I became one myself. I also

didn't go to a Christian college or seminary. So I didn't come into being a pastor's wife with any prior knowledge of how this thing is "supposed" to go or what I was "supposed" to do. In some ways, I think that's probably a blessing. I didn't know what I didn't know, which meant I had very few expectations for myself.

By the time my husband and I started the process of church revitalization, I had been a pastor's wife for 11 years. I felt like I had navigated the "fishbowl" life and had settled into the role as much as I could. But here's what I didn't know... Church renewal challenges you in this role in many ways that are unique to the specific calling of church revitalization and replanting. I want to let you in on a few secrets that I wish I had known when we started this journey.

Change is hard for everyone... Including you.

When we started our revitalization process, I really thought I was ahead of the game. I thought

I knew what needed to change and why, and that when those changes occurred, I'd be excited after talking about them for so long. After all, changes are discussed at my dinner table long before we discuss them in a church-wide meeting. My husband navigated any change well and walked our congregation through the various stages of change.

But just because change is necessary doesn't mean it's easy. Even a simple change, like converting a broken bathroom into a storage closet, brought challenges. (There is almost always a line for the ONE women's restroom we have upstairs.. A problem solved only when we made the two bathrooms unisex.) And, as prepared as I was for the change, I wasn't prepared for the challenges.

As challenges arose, so did complaints. Those complaints would leave me unsteady, wondering if we were moving too quickly or if we were doing the right thing. This constant tug between necessary change and challenges often pushed

me into a corner, fighting to defend the change while secretly wondering if the complainers were right. I wish someone had told me to prepare not only for change but for challenges!

It Feels Personal... But it isn't.

While we're on the subject of complaints... whew. I knew that as a pastor's wife, I would hear complaints about my husband. I had learned to let (almost) all of those go, to realize it's more about them than it is about him. I had learned to defend him without being defensive. But church renewal brought an entirely new level of attacks.

In church renewal, you might be fighting decades of apathy and even animosity; you're tearing down idols and building new, healthy attitudes into the church. So, while I was used to hearing frustration about my husband's preaching style or his leadership, I was completely unprepared to hear attacks on his character borne out of hearts of anger and bitterness. I was unprepared to see the replant team, on which I served, attacked for

making even simple suggestions. I was stunned to see people who had voted for, championed, and supported our family turn from us and leave the church over seemingly minor issues, often without ever speaking to us and telling us why.

I admit it. I took it VERY personally. It felt like they were rejecting us. Not just my family, but our church family. It felt like these weren't little jabs about my husband preaching too long or about my lack of cooking skills— these were full-scale attacks that left me reeling. These were sweet and kind women who used to love my family, now suddenly writing scathing emails about their Sunday school room being “destroyed” by children writing on an unused dry-erase board and demanding that we do something about the “disrespectful behavior.”

But here's what I wish I had known... Though the attacks felt personal, they weren't. Change is scary, and these men and women were scared to lose what they had known. They were frightened of a world that no longer seemed familiar to them,

and now we were changing the one place that had always been their safe place, where nothing had changed. The church looked and felt the same to them as it did when they took their children there... Indeed, in some ways, it had not changed since they, themselves, were children. It wasn't personal. I was just the person standing there.

It's worth it, but you've got to stay to see it.

If you've been in the Church Renewal world for long, you've likely heard about "Year Three." (I feel like "Year Three" needs some ominous music behind it.) It's not always literally the third year of the replant or revitalization, but that's a general guide. What we're really talking about when we say "Year Three" is the middle of the journey. Typically, a renewal takes about 5 years. The first couple of years are what I would call the Honeymoon Phase. Everyone is excited about your ideas. They agree they need to make some changes. They're ready to see the church healthy and growing! But then you start the hard work of

bringing the church to health, and somewhere around year three, things shift. People get uncomfortable, and they feel the pain of losing some things that need to go. People leave the church. You may have to address some unhealthy attitudes and have hard conversations. And at some point, you will want to leave.

I cannot tell you how many times I tried to convince my husband to leave when we were in the middle of the storm. But Galatians 6:9 is a verse that stuck with me during that time. “Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don’t give up.” I was so tired of fighting and so tired of trying so hard. But the Lord wasn’t calling us to go; He was telling us to stay. So we did. By year 5, we were seeing signs of life and health in our church. We were no longer in the ICU. In fact, we were out of recovery and close to being discharged with a clean bill of health. The dying church was now thriving in areas of discipleship, fellowship, and worship.

When I look at all the church has accomplished and all the ways we've grown, I'm so glad the Lord made me stay. All of the sleepless nights, silent prayers, and tense meetings had all been worth it. It has all led to a sweet, sweet place that I am so happy to call our home. I am now living in the harvest we were promised in Galatians 6:9. This is the proper time for it, but I never would have seen it if I had left in Year Three.

Replant Wife, I wish I'd known that one day our story would serve to allow me to help you! I wish I'd known that I would connect with so many of you to be able to encourage you, pray with you, and support you! I'm so glad that now I can share with you what I wish I had known, so you can know it!

CHAPTER 18

**WHAT TO EXPECT
WHEN YOU'RE
EXPECTING A
REPLANT!**

Jeanette Pugh

When my husband was asked the question, “Are you ready to be a Pastor?” He answered confidently, “Yes, of course!” But I often question: Am I prepared to be a Pastor's wife? What would people expect of me? I wanted to be accepted by everyone. I was thinking up all types of things to win the friendships of all of the 9 active church members that we had. So I asked a

pastor's wife who had been ministering alongside her husband for about 30 years, "What advice would you give a newbie like me?" She looked me straight in the eyes with her hand on my shoulder and said, "Be yourself." I had to think about it. God placed me here. If I go in being someone I'm not, I'm going to have to continue this front for only He knows how many years. That's not fulfilling the calling God has on my life.

I can't help to recall many years ago when I received the news that we were expecting a baby. I was so excited, but nervous at the same time. I had thoughts and plans for how my pregnancy will go. I wanted to eat healthy and keep up my exercise routine. But, throughout the months, I had weird cravings, a bigger appetite, started sleeping a lot more than exercising, and my hormones were all off. Needless to say, many thoughts go into expecting, but the truth is, you just never know what will happen.

As it relates to replant, when you received the news that you may be a replanter wife, you were

probably excited, your heart filled with joy, and you had so many plans for your new church home. You could have been just excited to serve, but not sure what to expect. The anticipation can be mind-boggling; however, it's not by accident or coincidence that you are in this position. Jeremiah 1:5 reminds us, " Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations."

As a believer in Christ, in the midst of it all, God is in control. Becoming a Pastor's wife may have caught you by surprise as a result of life changes; however, our all-knowing God knew before He even formed you that you would be here.

The expectations placed on a pastor's wife can be overwhelming. It is good to know you are not on this journey alone. Therefore, I'd like to share some expectations with you.

1. As an expecting replant wife...Expect people to put expectations on you.

Ephesians 4:11-12 NKJV

"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

For years, I did not know my purpose. It only got worse after becoming a Pastor's wife. People put expectations on me that I had no clue about. What to wear, how to speak, how to pray, and raise my children. If you know your purpose, you will find joy in fulfilling your purpose. Know who you are in Christ and how to use the gift God has given you. Even more, know your Purpose In Christ. Being confident in who you are edifies the body of Christ.

I was told by several Pastor wives that when I became a Pastor's wife, I would have to lead the women's ministry. I teach women's small group studies and help plan our women's event, but that is not a requirement of a Replant wife. Are you leading a ministry because someone told you

should or are you led by the Holy Spirit? When you are walking in your purpose, you serve with a joyful heart. There's no pressure from anyone else now that you're doing what God has required of you. Be confident in who God created you to be.

2. As an expecting replant wife... Expect changes to happen

I Timothy 4:15 NKJV

"Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all." Changes are going to happen personally. When you're expecting a little one, don't you expect your body to change? Things can't stay the same when you are about to give birth to what God has placed in you.

3. Expect to spend more time at church. As you grow in your walk with the Lord, you're going to gain new friends/relationships with families. You and your husband may be the first ones there and last to leave while leading small groups and planning events. Six months after we were at our Replant Church, the pandemic hit. The church

was shut down. My husband, my sister, and I were there with a cell phone, a tripod, and a lapel mic recording sermons to get the word out to members.

4. Change is going to happen with the building.

When you're expecting a little one, your home changes. Now you are baby-proofing, decorating a nursery, setting up cribs and bassinets, painting, and more. The building will probably change aesthetically to accommodate the needs of the people with your personal touch. Our church was once a school. We had classrooms so full of furniture, desks & books that we could barely open the classroom doors. We got a dumpster, donated some of it, and got rid of the rest. After a few months, members were in awe of the cleanliness and upgrades that were made. It looked like a whole new building.

5. Expect that Members and Membership are going to change. Not everyone will like the new changes that are being made. People will

come and go, but others will grow. Our church mission statement is We Grow. We serve. We love. We had a member who was mean to everyone; she had no desire to live out the mission statement. Eventually, she couldn't take it anymore, so she decided to part ways. We also had a member who barely said a word when she first joined, let alone pray out loud. Not too long ago, she called and prayed for my husband and me. She's on the prayer call every Sunday, and I believe it's all in God's plans.

Keep in mind the church belongs to Jesus, although most of the time the members think it belongs to them. They believe they've been conducting church a certain way for so long that it's always supposed to stay the same. God cares for His church so much that He placed your husband in a position to lead it. That might mean changes are going to happen, and everyone may not agree.

6. Expect your faith to be tested. James 1:2-4 says, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall

into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

Trust that life is going to be "lifing," and the truth is the enemy doesn't want to see the church do well. His primary job is to come to steal, kill, and destroy. Prior to us coming to our replant, no one bothered the building. But soon after we got there, we had burglaries a few times a week. Several windows were broken, the church was vandalized, and our van was stolen twice. But through it all, God has been faithful.

Your faith will need to be kept strong in the face of these tests, so that when trials do come, you're able to withstand those trials. If you're constantly pouring into others, you must remember to allow the Lord to pour into you as you grow closer to Him. Daily devotion and prayer will become your greatest tools for strengthening your faith.

7. Expect to be your husband's biggest supporter.

When you're expecting and it's time to go into labor, it's always good to have some support. Research shows that women who receive good social support during labor and childbirth tend, on average, to have shorter labors, to control their pain better, and to have less need for medical intervention. Supporting your husband with a smile and kind words can make ministry less painful. He has so many responsibilities as a pastor. Preaching every Sunday, teaching Bible study every week, sharing the gospel, leading ministries, counseling, community outreach, and the list goes on and on. Not to mention helping parents and family members, and spending time with you. He can be pulled in so many directions.

You can support your husband by cheering him on. For your husband to see you in the congregation and hear you say “Amen” communicates to him that his wife supports him. You may not be able to make it to every event, but for the ones that are important to him, be there.

He'll be honored to have you by his side. Anytime you have a chance to spend quality time together, that's an opportunity to bond.

Support your husband by reassuring him that you truly care for him. Tell him you love him, not routinely when he's leaving or getting off the phone. Use meaningful words of affirmation like "I enjoy doing life with you," and "I couldn't imagine being with anyone else," or perhaps, "God is truly pleased with the work you're doing as a leader." Compliment him when he does well and when he looks the part! My husband loves a compliment (most men do). I would prefer he hear it from me than anyone else. Even when things are not up to your standards, or if he didn't do it the way you suggested, he put forth the effort, and that's good enough for a compliment. At a couples retreat, we learned to F.L.I.R.T.(find love in rocky times). Sometimes life gets rough and things get busy, then love gets put onto the back burner. Being intentional about showing him that you care, especially in the tough times, can change the trajectory of his entire day or even

week! I sometimes leave a card or love note on my husband's desk, and he is always pleasantly surprised.

Just like my friend advised me to be myself, I advise you to follow Christ and never try to live up to anyone's expectations. There's a huge probability that you will miss the mark repeatedly if you are aiming for their expectation, but you can always hit a bullseye by aiming for the Lord's.

CHAPTER 19

YOUR FIRST 90 DAYS

Barb Bickford

PREACH. PRAY. LOVE. STAY. This is the Replant motto. It's catchy and I like the message. You may even see it on a t-shirt. However, it isn't as easy as it seems.

Longevity refers to the length of time, or how long something will last. Making a game plan for the first 90 days in your Replant can be a helpful way to get off on the right foot with your new

congregation. Careful consideration for what they have been through, the situation they currently find themselves in, and how best to move forward together will help you and your husband in this “new to you” ministry.

As I look back on our first days in our replant, moving forward in a positive way would have been easier had we assessed the situation with an open mind and no preconceived ideas. I get it, it's easy to want to work through these things mentally before you even get into it, but having an open mind helps things go smoother.

On a practical level, take several walks through the church building to see what potential projects jump out at you. Take mental notes, or actual notes. This will help you keep track of areas that need special attention. In most cases, churches that are in need of replant need a bit of updating, or at the very least some sprucing up. Our building had a great amount of space in the children's area, and the people there were so excited about the possibility of having children

run those halls again. What they hadn't realized was that over time, things became run down. There was a need to make it appealing to children and safe so new parents would feel comfortable dropping their kids off while they were in the main service.

I think it's also easy to forget to prepare mentally. Philippians 2:2 shares how we are to be like Christ by being like-minded and having the same love as him. This can make all the difference in how we interact with our fellow church members - those who have been around for a long time and those who are walking in the door for the first time. Being intentional about this will help us have more patience and not grow weary during times of long, difficult conversations.

Another area often ignored, or forgotten, is preparing yourself physically by getting good sleep, exercising, and eating healthy food that will energize your body and brain. We all make excuses about why we can't or don't get enough sleep, why we don't have time to exercise, and

how we need to pile the plate high with all the carbs and sugary treats at the church potluck. Unfortunately, they are just excuses and won't help us in our efforts to serve the Lord well. Discipline in these areas will keep our brains sharp. Taking care of our bodies also sets a good example for our church members, and that honors the Lord.

As the pastor's wife, you will be the recipient of all kinds of verbal blasts. At times, members will be kind and share encouraging words with you - like when they commend you for the good behavior of your children. At other times, they will unleash their frustration with harsh and even mean words - like when they complain to you about the recent changes your husband made to the stage decorations. Learning to love those whose tongues need to be harnessed is a necessary challenge. Being prepared emotionally for these situations, as much as you can, will help you when they arise. It's ok to feel sad or frustrated. I'm not saying you need to handle all of these situations perfectly. I just want to encourage you to

emotionally prepare for their arrival so you won't be caught off guard when they do come up.

The most important way to prepare yourself is spiritually for the journey ahead of you. Just because you are doing the Lord's work, don't think you are immune to spiritual attack. In fact, any time we are making progress for the Kingdom, it puts a target on our backs. Satan is not a fan of people coming to Jesus. He will do all he can to interrupt the good work you and your husband are doing in your replant. This can manifest itself as broken down cars, rebellious kids, sickness, discouragement, and depression, just to name a few. When these things started happening to my family, and we recognized them as spiritual warfare, we gathered a group of prayer warriors around our family and covered ourselves and our kids in prayer. One afternoon, we, along with our prayer warriors, did a prayer walk through our church. There were specific areas that felt oppressed, and we recognized that as Satan having a stronghold on the classes that met in those rooms. So we prayed that those strongholds would be loosed. During a

particularly difficult time in our family, we gathered those same prayer warriors in our living room, and they cried out to the Lord with and for us. I can't stress enough the importance of having a prayer team in action on your behalf.

Another important thing to do in the first 90 days is to get to know the people in your church. It's very important to start with a blank slate when learning about the people in your Replant. Ask lots of questions. This is a great way to get to know your people personally. Time spent with them goes a long way in building a relationship. Don't forget these people have been in this church 10, 20, 30 years or more. This church is new to you, but it has been home to them for a long time, for some of them a lifetime. Hearing their perspective on the history of their church as well as its current status will be eye-opening and helpful. Ask Mrs. J what brought her to the church and what has kept her there. Ask Mr. C about the leadership and where his favorite areas to serve are. Find out what it is they love about their church and where they feel like the church

needs to change. It's easy to come in with preconceived ideas about who the people are and how they do things, even how they got to the place they are, of needing to be replanted. A better goal is to assess the situation with a clear mind and open heart. When my husband and I first arrived at our Replant, we decided to meet with each and every current member. We set appointments to meet with them in their homes - interestingly enough, none of them lived in the neighborhood of the church. This shed some light on why they were so out of touch with who may possibly be interested in attending their church. We learned a lot about their hopes for the future of their church, their opinions on how things went in the past, and their desire to make some changes in many areas at present. We also learned who the power brokers were, what the long-time "sacred cows" were, and some areas of resistance. All of these things are important as you seek to take your first steps forward in your Replant. Ask follow-up questions to the first question. Remember, this is your opportunity to learn, not solve any issues.

Piggybacking off of getting to know your church members is to build relationships with them. This will help build longevity in those first ninety days. This may be out of your comfort zone (hands up, fellow introverts), but it's a great opportunity for growth. We are all naturally drawn to certain people, and that's great. But as the pastor's wife, you have the unique opportunity to influence people that you may not have otherwise. My challenge to you is to also build relationships with those you aren't naturally drawn to. I hate to say it, but when you find favor with people, your husband, by proxy, may also find favor with those same people. This can be helpful in the future as changes come about that may feel uncomfortable to your long-time members. A great way to start building relationships is to ask your members about themselves or their families. Then follow up in the future. Ask how their kids and grandkids are doing. Find out about any needs they have in their homes. What are their hobbies? How long have they been following Jesus? What was their family like growing up? Show true interest in them and what they care about. We would often

invite church members to join us for lunch after church. We also encouraged the entire church body to do the same. Everyone has to eat lunch! Sharing a meal is a great way to bring down any barriers that might exist. It's also important to share about your life as they ask. No need to air the dirty laundry, but being a bit transparent shows you trust them and want to have a relationship with them.

How you handle the first 90 days in your replant will set the stage for your future at this church. Assessing the situation with an open mind and no preconceived ideas, getting to know your church members, and building relationships with the long-time members in your replant will go a long way in improving your chances of longevity in your church. Remember, your goal is to STAY.

CHAPTER 20

WHAT DO YOU WANT FROM ME?

Barb Bickford, Joyce Jackson

According to Google, Expectations are a strong belief that something will happen or be the case in the future; also, a belief that someone will or should achieve something. Recognizing, managing, and communicating your expectations, as well as the expectations of those in your church, is key to longevity in your replant. Expectations can make the difference between smooth transitions and rocky roads.

Sharing your personal expectations for yourself as well as your expectations for your church members can get things off on the right foot. Depending on our personality types, we all have expectations of ourselves. Specifically, as replant pastor wives, we may have some preconceived ideas of our roles in the church. What are yours? Is this something you have thought about? I'll admit when I first became a pastor's wife, I struggled to find my role. I wanted to live up to all the expectations everyone had of me, and those I had of myself. As I matured and got a few years and different ministry positions under my belt, I realized that was unrealistic. I am not perfect and cannot be the perfect pastor's wife. Neither can you, so here is your permission slip to let yourself off the hook. I learned it was best to be open and honest with myself and those in our church about what my expectations were of myself. Plain and simple, my expectations of myself were that my relationship with God came first, my family came second, and my church responsibilities came third. This doesn't always fly with everyone, but it's good to get it out in the open in the beginning.

Clarifying my expectations of what my church responsibilities were was also very helpful. I highly recommend it. I don't fit into the typical pastor's wife mold, and that's fine. You may not either. It's helpful to our church members to let them know what to expect early on.

Defining your expectations of your church members will go a long way in being able to work together effectively. Do you expect them to step up when there is an obvious need, or do you expect them to wait until someone asks them to help? What level of initiative would you like them to take? Having these conversations early on in your replant can help avoid pitfalls in the future. I always want people to serve in the areas where they feel gifted. This helps avoid burnout. Sharing the load and helping your people see the need is helpful to them as well.

Discovering your church members' expectations of you and of themselves is also good. It's a two-way street. The best way to discover this is simply to ask. Keep in mind, your people have a history

of pastor wives. Some of them may have played the piano and worked in the nursery. Some may have cleaned the toilets and printed the bulletins. Some may have been distant and uninterested. Some may have been absent. Certainly, they all came with an array of personalities, attitudes, and behaviors. There's no pastor's wife manual, and certainly no replant pastor's wife manual, so no one is going to do it perfectly. For sure, though, there will be people in your church who have very specific expectations of you as the pastor's wife. Some will expect you to be at the church as much as your husband - a two-for-one deal if you will. Some will expect you to dress to the nines, even on the meager salary (or half salary) they are providing. Some will expect you to fill all the holes. And some will expect to be your very best friend, complete with you sharing everything you learn about all the church members. A good amount of the time, their expectations will be unspoken. It's difficult enough to live up to the spoken ones, not that I'm suggesting you should. But it's the unspoken ones that can really cause frustration and even pain.

Recognizing expectations sometimes comes after a sticky situation arises. I could have been more aware of the expectations of some people in our church, specifically the person whose expectations I didn't fulfill. This may have helped me realize that person's need for something more from me than I was giving. Then I would have had the opportunity to talk with her about it. Hear me say, just because someone has a certain expectation of you does not mean you are required to fulfill it. But knowing what it is can give you the opportunity to have a conversation with that person about it. Getting things out in the open can help you move forward together. And this is important to the longevity of your time at your replant.

Managing the expectations you have of yourself and others is a healthy way to keep things in perspective. I had to run my expectations through the lens of God first, family second, and church third. I did the same with my expectations of others and did my best to communicate this so they could adjust their expectations of me. We

have to revisit this on a regular basis to make sure we are all on the same page.

We all have expectations on us and of us. We often feel them, even if they are unspoken. It can help to recognize where these assumptions come from and whether or not we are called to meet them. Breaking these into categories may help us better manage and identify them.

Spousal expectations:

Ministry husbands have a tendency to assume that we can catch those things that don't fit on their overflowing plate. Sometimes, you pick up a task that you think is a one-time event, and suddenly it has become your permanent responsibility. Especially in ministry families, you need to have a plan to reevaluate your calling, what is reasonable, and what you might need to let fall to the ground to see if someone else in the church will pick it up.

If you don't schedule regular reevaluations, it is easy to become overwhelmed. I recommend at

least once a season, or if you are very busy, once a month. We have a family calendar that I print out so we know when Dad will be gone, which meetings we will both attend, how many we need to cook for each dinner, appointments, etc. Calendar review time is a good time to lay out all of your responsibilities and see if something needs to shift, including the opportunity to do something that feeds and fills your soul.

Childrens Expectations:

Whatever phase you are in with your children, it is temporary. Calendar review time is also a good time to think about how they participate in family and church life. They are valuable and bring much to the table. Have them consider how God made them (talents and heart concerns) and how they can find their place to shine. You can't do tomorrow what your children need from you today. Stop for them, pray with them, laugh with them. Today is your one shot to get it right.

YOUR Expectations:

Jesus loves YOU! Who are you? Uniquely you, one of a kind, intentionally designed you! Feed who God made you to be. What makes you smile? What gives you that AH-feeling? What gets you excited? This should be your positive motivation, not pressure from someone else disguised as motivation. It is easy to lose yourself in the bustle of activity. We are told to pick up our cross- not just any cross, but our *own*. We do have to die to self, but not with the goal of becoming what others want us to be. We die to self so **God** can give us new life in Him. Living out someone else's purpose for our lives is not dying to self; it is living someone else's version of you. God calls you to life and life abundant. New life, fresh purpose, fresh energy, fresh insight. Your new life should be bigger and better than the old life you left behind.

Family Expectations:

Your job is to protect and provide for your immediate family. Your extended family can place expectations on you that don't line up with God's plan. At the same time, God gave you that

family. Maybe it is actually part of your ministry as well. Your church folks will watch how you interact with your family and will think this is the appropriate path. Not every relative is a healthy person to have in your life, or to hold closely. If they pull you or your children down, if they make you uncomfortable, establish healthy boundaries.

Work Expectations:

Whether you work inside the home or outside of the home, every ministry wife has a full agenda. How are you serving your family in God's plan? Talk to Him about how it works for you and how it doesn't work for you. There are always challenges. Lay them out before God. Ask Him how you can better partner with Him in this part of your life. Sometimes God wants you to fold your hands and wait. It isn't always about doing more. We feel so responsible to make things work together for good, but that's God's job. Let God be the boss of this part of your life as well.

God's Expectations:

God's expectations have been a surprise to me. They are always more reasonable (when I ask Him) than others' expectations or even my own expectations. His expectations are more focused, less juggling everything at once. I have to admit, often either God is slow to answer, or I am slow to grasp His leading. One of the things about the Bible that surprises me is that Jesus was never in a hurry. He did not run from village to village to heal everyone He could. I know He was busy and sometimes ran out of resources to provide for His ministry, but even that was part of God's greater plan! God's expectations of you are more about growing you (remember the 12 baskets of leftovers the 12 disciples collected) than accomplishing some task. He loves you! He wants your attention! He calls you for your own good, not that it will be easy, but it will grow you in ways nothing else can. If you make Jesus happy, everything will be aligned properly. You serve an audience of one.

And finally, the Expectation-free zone:

Down time involves spiritual discipline too!! It takes faith to lay down the “doing” and rest in God, to enjoy the good life He has given you. Recently, my husband and I spent time with friends. It literally took months for us to plan and pull off a lunch together. No agenda- just catching up. Afterwards, I realized that I felt so much more relaxed about life. And surprisingly, I liked my husband more, too! Now I love my husband all of the time, but he is definitely a doer. He can get stuck in “doing” mode. Like the car that is intentionally in 2nd gear to pull up a steep mountain incline, you hear the grind, you know you need to be patient, you can’t pause halfway up the hill in a car on an incline or it will overstress the engine, you will lose inertia, all progress, all traction. You just can’t, STOP! But we are human. We do need to pause, and we need help to get out of that grinding Expectation gear. Just like this lunch with friends helped me see my husband through their eyes and appreciate him for the creative, compassionate doer he is. Routinely, step away from the path of

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expectations or be run over and burnt out; those are your options.

CHAPTER 21

THE CALLING AND THE CALENDAR

A TIME TO REST

Barb Bickford, Darlene Dryer

Billy Graham said, “Nothing can calm our souls more, or better prepare us for life’s challenges, than time spent alone with God.” The world tells us to go, go, go. Even in church, the expectations are often that you, as the pastor’s wife, will keep at it until it’s done, no matter the cost. I’m confident this is not what God had in mind.

Learning how to rest and then actually doing it is imperative to longevity in ministry. As replanters, our tendency is to see the things that need to be fixed and think that we can just take a few minutes to fix them. Of course, rarely does it just take a few minutes. Resting isn't one of those things that we see as a need. However, if we don't set boundaries for rest, the results will be evident and painful to us and those around us. As Pastor Graham said, the best way to rest is to spend time with God. He reminded us that rest is a Biblical concept. God did it. Jesus did it. And we should do it too.

Matthew 11:28-29 (ESV) says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." What is the best way to rest? According to this verse, the best way is by coming to the Lord. That can look like a myriad of things, such as alone time, exercise, hobbies, Bible reading, or anything you deem to be fun and enjoyable.

Resting doesn't just mean lying around. Sometimes it does actually mean sleep. Your body will tell you when you need it. Too often we ignore that need, and as a result we suffer physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Even God rested after he created the world. (Genesis 2:2-3) Jesus took time away from the crowd and also took time to rest. (Mark 6:31) We need good quality sleep to rejuvenate our mind and soul.

When you play, play hard. Believe it or not, for some of us, resting can look like being active - spending time outside enjoying nature, hiking, walking, or playing whatever sport you enjoy. Engaging your body physically is also good for your mental health. It's hitting two birds with one stone.

Alone time could mean a walk around the neighborhood, enjoying God's creation, reading your Bible at some point in the day without distraction, or going on a personal retreat. Several years ago I took a personal retreat at the suggestion of my counselor. I found a safe place

about an hour from our home where I could rent a small one-person cabin. I put my phone away and spent the day hiking, enjoying nature, and writing. Unplugging in this way was truly good for my soul. I came away refreshed. Being intentional about your alone time with God is a great way to discover how he is revealing Himself to you.

Creating some boundaries around our time and our family allows us to have space for rest. If we don't create boundaries, our time will be swallowed up, and rest will get pushed to the back. This can be a challenge for all of us. One of these boundaries can be unplugging from social media and the news. This sounds easy, but screen addiction is a real thing. Do this in realistic steps. For you, maybe this means unplugging for a few hours at first. Then you can build up to longer periods of time. Some of you can start with unplugging for a day or more. Some may even take a longer hiatus. I know a gal who gives it up for Lent every year. No one ever regrets taking a break from social media. You will be amazed at

the amount of time you just freed up to spend with your people, read, or whatever.

Another great way to rest is to create priorities around your family time. Not only does this bring joy to your heart, but it also shows your family that they are a priority to you. It is a good example to them that laughing, playing, and resting are things that honor God and help you serve him well. There was a period of time when our kids were all still home, and we had what we called Family Day. It was just that, a day spent with just our family. Our Family Day happened on Sunday afternoons and/or evenings. We took turns choosing what we were going to do. And the rule was that no one could complain about what was chosen by that day's appointed person. We always had fun. Our activities ran the gamut - movies (either at the theater or at home), board games, wiffleball, walking the dogs, going to a park, or getting ice cream, just to name a few. Phones were put away, and our focus was on each other and conversation. These were some of my favorite times with my family.

So no matter how you rest, the important thing to remember is to do it. Make it a priority and center it around time spent with the Lord. That's the best way to experience true, rejuvenating rest. This may be one of the most important skills to increase the longevity of your replant.

In his book *Rhythms*, Andy Addis has an illustration that stops me in my tracks. He asks, "Would your church remove you from office if you were caught in adultery?" I think that's a pretty resounding YES for most pastors and wives. He then asks, "If you committed murder, would your church fire you?" Again, I firmly believe all of our churches would fire us quickly for that. But then he asks, "If you did not take a Sabbath, what would your church do?" Addis correctly identifies a problem here: They would probably pat you on the back, acknowledge your hard work, offer you a raise, and encourage your productivity. Adultery, murder, and neglecting a sabbath are all on the same Ten Commandments list. Why are we not paying attention to the latter like we should?

The Old Testament points out a sabbath day and a sabbath year. Exodus 20:8-11 explains that we should remember the sabbath and keep it holy. The seventh day of the week should be set aside for us to commune with God. The Sabbatical year refers to the land. The field should only be harvested for six years, and for the seventh year, the ground should rest. This makes me think of the passage from Luke 19:40, even the rocks will cry out. This is His creation! Including us! The land even shows God's guidance because it is more productive after a rest! The land has longevity when used appropriately. How much more productive could we be if we were to rest? Jesus lived this out when he was ministering to others. Here are three examples of Jesus resting.

1. He would retreat before major spiritual battles: Mark 1:12, before the devil tempted him in the desert.
2. He would retreat after exhaustion: Mark 1:35, after ministering to the sick.
3. He would retreat after crowds: Mark 1:45 seeks solitude when the needs become distracting from the ministry.

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Are you taking a sabbath? We are so obedient to His calling to the church and its members. Are we equally obedient to His command on our lives for rest? Why not? Are we too proud of our reputation if we slow our pace? But really, are we sprinters or marathon runners?

We need rest.

HOW TO HANDLE THE POST-HOLIDAY BLUES

Audrea Stewart

I walked into my living room just now holding a my Santa mug with a steaming cup of peppermint mocha, gazed at the Christmas tree with its lights all aglow, and thought, “Someone is going to have to put this all away.” Sigh. In a few days, it will be January 1, and all of the Christmas magic will be gone and replaced with a normal house and freezing temperatures. I feel like I have been on a holiday roller coaster of hustle and bustle since Thanksgiving, and now that the ride is over, I am left feeling bewildered and full of holiday candy.

It's almost like I need a holiday from our holidays.

This is not the first year I have battled Christmas letdown. I was explaining to some friends the other day about the January Blues. This term has become widely known, and some have even designated the third Monday in January as “the most depressing day of the year.” This is due to the back-to-reality feeling some get after the holidays when we wake up from our Christmas stupor and face possible overspending on gifts and holiday overeating over the previous months, combined with the realization that those New Year resolutions are probably not going to happen, all the while battling cold, dark, shorter winter days. As a ministry family, January can also be extra hard because not only are you coming off of an insane non non-stop holiday schedule, but church attendance and tithes are possibly very light this month as well. For some of us, January can potentially seem like a bleak reality check.

This seems strange that “the most wonderful time of the year,” where we celebrate our Savior’s birth, would be followed by what some have called “the most depressing month of the year.” It reminds me of a story that always puzzled me in the Old Testament. In 1 Kings 18, we read about Elijah’s success in calling down fire from Heaven and defeating the prophets of Baal. It was quite the biblical victory! However, only a few verses into the very next chapter, we see him sitting underneath a broom tree, praying that he could die. Talk about going from an inspiring high to a devastating low. What I love most about this passage is that God sent an angel to meet him exactly where he was. Elijah took a nap, and then 1 Kings 19:5 says that the angel told Elijah “to get up and eat.” Elijah ate and drank, took another nap, and the angel told Elijah in verse 7 to “Get up and eat or the journey will be too much for you.”

Many times, especially as Replant Wives, we can spend the holiday season taking care of everyone else’s needs and neglecting our own basic necessities. If you find yourself in the middle of a

“Blue January,” take an honest assessment. Are you feeling dry spiritually? Have you been getting enough rest? Have you been taking care of yourself physically? Have you been allowing yourself a consistent Sabbath time? If not, and you feel yourself wanting to be like Elijah and sit under your own broom tree and cry, perhaps it is time for a season of rest and being rejuvenated by God’s word. May your days be merry and bright and your Januaries be filled with the peace and perspective only our Savior can bring.

NEW YEAR, NEW YOU?

Audrea Stewart

Whenever one year comes to a close, I am reminded of the words of the ancient Roman philosopher Lucius Seneca: “Every new beginning comes from some other beginning’s end.” It’s that time of year when we start evaluating what went right in the past year and what we would like to change for the new one.

This is why I assume New Year’s resolutions are so popular. Love them or hate them, New Year’s resolutions are a yearly tradition for many. According to Pew Research, “nearly half of adults ages 18-29 made at least one New Year’s resolution in 2024. 31% of adults ages 18-29 made a 2024 resolution, and only about 21% of adults 50 years and up made any resolution.”

Personally, I like to evaluate the end of a season before starting a new one. As GK Chesterton once said, “The object of a new year is not that we

should have a new year, but rather that we should have a new soul.” Personal reflection and evaluation is time well spent as we ask the Lord to order our steps for the New Year.

Here are a few questions that I use in my personal reflection time as I evaluate my commitments each year, and they might be helpful to you, as well.

1. What went wrong last year? Sometimes, things just go wrong and off track. We are imperfect people, and if I could sit across from each of you with a cup of coffee, I am sure we could both lament over things that didn't go as well as we would like last year. Whether it was a sin issue of your own or a loved one, a time-consuming commitment that you should never have made, or a ministry or household responsibility that needs some tweaking, feel free to say out loud, “That wasn’t my best work, and I think there needs to be changes made to this situation.” Every situation that was less than perfect is an opportunity for spiritual growth and

learning. Write down some action steps to make some changes for the new year after meditating on those pain points.

2. What went right last year? This is the time to evaluate and celebrate our wins. What worked for last year, and how could you carry that win into the new year? This could be family time spent together, a successful ministry that you started and that exceeded your expectations, maybe you finally got a handle on personal fitness or finance, or you had a successful time implementing a new habit or hobby. Write down the steps to continue in the same direction and the goals to make these areas thrive even more.

3. What do I wish could be different? Was last year a lonely year for you in your Replant ministry life? Do you wish that you could have deeper friendships? Do you have a child who is far away from the Lord? Are finances tight? Do you want to be more disciplined with your health, time, or bank account? Write down all those wishes and thoughts and take them to the Lord.

Ask Him to help you change the areas you have the power to change, and ask him to change the hearts of others if you have no control over these situations.

4. What is God calling you to keep doing? After evaluating what went right, examine your commitments for this year closely and see if what you agreed to do last year aligns with what He wants you to do this year.

5. What is God calling you to stop doing? One of the most helpful lists I have ever made as a Replant Wife is my “to DON’T” list. Here’s how you evaluate what should be on that list: What commitments are you making out of obligation or expectations of others? Put that on your “to don’t” list. What habits or actions are causing you to sin or stumble? Cut that out of your life right now. Is there something that is a good thing but not necessarily what is good for this season? Put that on your “not right now, but maybe later on” list.

6. What is God calling you to start doing? Isaiah 41:19 is one of my favorite verses because it just seems full of hope and new possibilities. “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” Is there a new opportunity God has presented you with that sparks joy in your heart? Maybe you are hesitant because you are nervous about whether you will be able to follow through. Take it to the Lord and ask Him to give you clarity.

When speaking on New Year's resolutions, Billy Graham once said, “People by nature build, tear down, and rebuild. We build our hopes, get disappointed, and then search for renewed hope. That is why we are fond of New Year's resolutions... Faith in God calls for building from the inside out.” It's my prayer for you, Replant Wife, as one year comes to a close, that God orders your steps as you prepare to build, tear down, and rebuild in the New Year and that He gives you renewed energy and vision for the gritty

and glorious work He has called you and your family to accomplish.

(For a detailed look at how to practically evaluate and plan for your New Year, please see <https://replantwife.com/blog/f/creating-your-next-steps-for-the-new-year>.)

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL: WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR VOLUNTEER LIST AND BUDGET ARE LOW

Audrea Stewart

It has been a long-held Southern Baptist tradition that one week of the summer, the church buildings are filled with wild decorations, excited kids, and (mostly) enthusiastic volunteers. This time-honored tradition was first envisioned by Mrs. Walker Aylett Hawes, a doctor's wife from Charlottesville, Virginia. Mrs. Hawes observed while assisting her husband with medical missions to the children of New York City that

many of her husband's young patients were getting injured because they were bored and had no safe and productive activities to occupy their time. So she created a summer bible school program for the neighborhood children. Over time, her vision of summer bible schools gained vast popularity. By the 2000s, 3,000,000 children across the United States were being reached for the gospel through this week-long event that we now know as Vacation Bible School.

Despite the long-held tradition, as a church Replant, it may be a daunting task to host a week-long ministry event. Replants often scramble to find volunteers for basic weekly ministry needs and struggle to pay monthly bills with shrinking budgets. So, before hosting a Vacation Bible School at your Replant, it would be beneficial to consider your church's "why."

Before you begin planning a VBS, you must first determine why your church would host this event. Ask yourself, "Why are we putting on VBS

in the first place?” Is it because our church has always held a Vacation Bible School, and we feel like we need to uphold tradition? Or is it because this will be a helpful event for our ministry inside the church and our mission to spread the gospel to the community? If you choose to host this event for the latter reason, then carry on full steam ahead. However, if you are only hosting VBS because of the first reason, be careful not to host *any* event just because it is what your church has always done. What has always worked in the past may not be what God would have you do in your current season.

Consider the Logistics:

Once you have prayerfully decided to host a Vacation Bible School, you must ask yourself several logistical questions. First, how many children do we estimate attending this event? Next, you need to consider the volunteers required to accommodate the number of kids who might attend. Also, are these the same 5-10 people who sign up for everything? If so, they may be close to burnout, and it might not be best for

them to serve in this capacity at this time. Finally, you need to consider how much money your church has budgeted for hosting a VBS.

Suppose that after prayerful consideration, you feel like a Vacation Bible School would be beneficial to your church and community, but after estimating potential attendance numbers, you are nervous that you don't have enough volunteers. What should you do? Here are a few practical ideas:

1. Ask your local association for help. Potentially, there are large local churches that would not mind sending a missions team to help your church pull off this event. They may be especially willing if they have just finished the same VBS curriculum. This would be an easy mission experience for a local church and a benefit to your congregation and neighborhood.

2. Reach out to your state convention or other churches out of state. Another church outside of your city or state could use your church's VBS as a youth group or family mission trip. Both your

church and their church would be blessed and encouraged. This might also pave the way for more ministry partnerships in the future between your congregations.

3. Team up with another small local church to pull off the event. Partnering with sister churches to pull off a large event that you would not be able to do alone is a blessing to both churches. One church could provide the building, and both could contribute volunteers and resources. You can divide the cost and pool your resources so that neither church feels overwhelmed.

Another key aspect of making sure VBS runs smoothly is to make sure your church has the budget and resources to host the event. Here are some creative suggestions to help with the overall cost.

1. Ask other churches if you could use their leftover decorations and materials. Many

churches are happy to share their decorations and leftover curriculum. After spending lots of time and money on VBS supplies and decor, it can feel wasteful to toss everything in the trash can. It feels good knowing that you are donating it to another ministry. It is a win-win for you both!

2. Ask local businesses to help sponsor your event. Grocery stores could provide snacks. Local businesses could help provide funds for resources and supplies. This would be a tax write-off for them and a huge blessing to your church.

3. Ask your church members to donate snacks and craft supplies. Some of your older congregation members may not be able to physically volunteer at VBS, but would be more than willing to donate snacks or art supplies if you provide them with a wish list of needs. Others might not be able to commit to serve because of time constraints, but would be willing to serve the church in this manner. Also, this provides an opportunity to ask those who donate to commit to

praying over the volunteers and families who will attend the event.

4. Make an online wish list. Create an Amazon wish list that is shareable over social media. Other church friends across the country who would like to support your ministry would be able to help ease your church's financial burden with a few clicks.

5. Create your own curriculum or find a free one. If your church cannot afford to purchase a big box VBS, consider researching free VBS options. There are many websites that offer this option. You could even consider creating your own curriculum and theme.

Times are changing, and so are the ways churches can reach kids and communities. According to statistics, many churches are opting to no longer host traditional Vacation Bible School. So, as previously stated, your church may not need to host a week-long VBS. What are some other ways

you could accomplish the missional goals of traditional VBS?

Depending on your church volunteer base, budget requirements, and the needs of your community, it may be most beneficial to host only a one or two-day event. In some situations, less is often more.

When VBS was first created in the 1800s, the church sought out the kids where they were to meet a spiritual and practical need. Consider hosting a bible club in your neighborhood, a bible story-centered block party at the church, or taking a small group of volunteers to a local park. You could plan a small craft, teach a bible story, and give out popsicles or snacks. You will be accomplishing a similar goal of ministering to kids on a more manageable scale.

Many smaller churches choose to host an evening Vacation Bible School. By hosting this event at night, you open up the event to more volunteers

who have work commitments during the daytime.

Whether your church hosts Vacation Bible School or not, it is crucial to decide its mission goals and vision for reaching the next generation and young families. Thinking outside of the box and being creative about resources and enlisting volunteers is key. Never lose sight of the ultimate goal of any type of kids ministry event is for children in your community to know and love Christ deeply. Don't get so caught up in the how that you lose sight of the why. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." (Matthew 19:14)

THRIVING AS A PASTOR'S WIFE AT CHRISTMAS

Audrea Stewart

"Silent Night, Holy Night. All is calm; all is bright." Well... Not always, especially if you are a

Replant Pastor's wife during the middle of a packed holiday season! In years past, a common theme ran through December: to race through the month, white-knuckled, and with a stressed-out grin plastered on my face, muttering, "It's fine. It's fine. Everything is fine." This can not possibly be what the Lord intended for "The most wonderful time of the year."

This year, I have decided to be more intentional with the season. This year, I am aiming to not just survive the holidays but also thrive. This is my Christmas wish for you, too, dear Replant Pastor Wife friend. So, I wanted to share with you my goals for the season.

1. Prioritize your yeses.

"Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." (Ephesians 5:15-17) I realize this is tricky because there are a million Christmas parties, Christmas concerts, gifts to buy, presents to wrap, people to visit, and errands

to run, all of which are added on top of all of your normal, everyday responsibilities. Remember that you are just one woman. Through God, you can do anything, but you can't do everything. You are only human, after all.

2. Schedule time with God. "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps." (Proverbs 16:9) I know this should be a given, but it's so easy to neglect our time with the Lord when our schedule is filled. Allow Him to guide your steps and fill your cup for this busy season. One tradition I have gifted myself is to choose a special Christmas-themed devotional to read alone every morning. There is something about waking up early with a hot cup of coffee and spending time with the Lord while staring at my Christmas tree that keeps me sane in an otherwise crazy season.

3. Remember your why. "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:33) Sometimes, we get so wrapped up in doing all the things that we forget the reason we are

doing them in the first place. Jesus is the reason for the season. Don't lose sight of that.

4. Schedule time with life-giving people. "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." (Proverbs 17:17) Many assignments and jobs during the Christmas season will take energy from you. Make sure to schedule phone calls, coffee chats, or double dates ahead of time with people who make you laugh and feel sane. I know you might be thinking, "How is there possibly time for this?" I'm telling you, you need to schedule this Christmas gift for yourself. You and your people will thank me later.

5. Speaking of your people, don't forget to schedule core memory moments with your people. Barbara Bush once said, "At the end of your life, you will never regret not having passed one more test, not winning one more verdict, or not closing one more deal. You will regret time not spent with a husband, a friend, a child, a parent." You don't want to wake up on January 1 and wonder where the whole holiday season went

because you were so busy serving the church and everyone else that you forgot to enjoy the people who live in your house. Schedule plans for special Christmas fun with your people, or it won't happen.

6. Finally-- and this is very important-- schedule a re-coup time. "Come with me by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." (Mark 6:31) After a busy season of ministry, Jesus commanded the disciples to get in a boat with him and rest. You don't have endless hours or energy. Make sure to plan a few days of post-holiday Sabbath rest. If possible, get away from town for a few days or plan a staycation. You will most likely have given out all of your energy by December 25 and need to refill your cup. After all, sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do after serving the Lord in a big way is to take a nap; just ask Elijah.

Contributors



Audrea Stewart is a wife, homeschooling mama of three hilarious kids, and Christ follower. From 2014 - 2020 Audrea served at a church replant in Jacksonville, Florida alongside her husband JimBo Stewart who now serves as the Associate Director of the NAMB Replant Team. Audrea and JimBo met at William Carey College where they both received their degrees in theatre. She has been a pastor's wife since 2004 and a pastor's daughter since she was two years old. Audrea has been a speaker for various NAMB events such as Am I A Replanter and the Replant Summit, co-host of the Replant Wife Podcast, and is very passionate about encouraging Replant Wives. audreastewart@gmail.com



Barb Bickford grew up in church. Even though she declared at a young age she would never marry a pastor, she did! Barb and Bob, her husband of over 35 years, have spent their lives together in various ministry settings. They spent over nine years replanting a church in the St Louis, MO metro and are currently living in Nashville, TN where Bob is the Executive Director of the Nashville Baptist Association. Barb has had the opportunity to encourage pastor wives in small group settings, as well as being a speaker at various NAMB events and co-host of the Replant Wife Podcast. She enjoys encouraging and praying for women in their walk with Christ. Barb is Mama to three incredible young adults, Gammy to six of the most precious little humans and dog mom to a rescued pittie mix named Daisy. bicksfive@gmail.com



Darlene Dryer is the devoted wife of an amazing pastor and mission strategist, proud mother to three beautiful daughters, and passionate about walking alongside others in ministry and life. She serves as the leader of the NAMB Replant Spouse Care team, where she encourages and equips ministry wives across the

Replant Wife

country. With a Master's degree in Christian Counseling from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a Doctor of Ministry in Counseling from Liberty University, Darlene counsels some of the strongest women in the world - helping them find healing, hope and resilience. A homeschool mom, ocean enthusiast and lover of travel, Darlene finds joy in the little moments and believes deeply in the power of faith, family and calling. ddryer_contractor@namb.net



Erin Cofield never imagined she would be a “pastor’s wife,” but after 16 years in ministry, she guesses it’s true! She and Will were high school sweethearts and have been married for 28 years. They have three kids, all in various stages of adulthood. Erin has a BA in English with a Creative Writing Cognate from Regent University and is working toward an MA in Women’s Ministry from Southeastern Seminary. She works full-time at a Pregnancy Resource

Center and part-time as the Worship Leader for her church. Her other loves include Italian food, desserts, and UGA football. emcofield23@gmail.com



Jeanette Pugh has been married to Colin Pugh for over 25 years, mother to four amazing adult children and two adorable grandchildren. Together they have been in Replanting since 2019 at Clinton Baptist Church in Maryland near Washington, DC. Jeanette enjoys serving the community, ministering to women, and growing in God’s Word. Outside of ministry, she is a clinical coordinator for an orthodontic

practice. When she is not ministering or working you can find her traveling, cooking vegan meals, dating her husband, and most of all spending time with family. j.pugh0404@gmail.com

THE LORD MEANT IT FOR GOOD



Joyce Jackson grew up watching her contractor father rehab houses. Joyce knows the value of replacing pieces that no longer serve the family with safe, more appropriate, sound structural elements. Walking with her husband through churches in transition is the same. Church growth never happens without discomfort; but respecting history, caring about congregation concerns, and

focusing on the big WHY of the GOSPEL paves the way forward. Progress is an uphill journey that God calls each of us into for His glory. acts2v28@yahoo.com



Kathy Addis and her husband Andy have been married for more than 30 years and enjoy being parents to two incredible sons and their beautiful wives, along with being Amma and Afi to their amazing grandson!. The Addis' have served as the pastoral family at CrossPoint Church, a rural multisite serving more than a dozen locations in Kansas. Being a pastor's wife for the entirety of their married lives, Kathy has had the privilege of

walking with, encouraging and being encouraged by so many other inspiring pastor's wives. She has seen the blessing of being the Volunteer Ministry Wives Coordinator for their two-state convention and leads the prayer ministry at her church. Kathy loves hanging out with her family and especially date nights with her "Sweetness." She is an occasional blogger (<http://theruralpastorswife.com>) and a cohost on the CPXL podcast with Andy. She enjoys getting her hands dirty refurbishing old furniture in her garage and crafting anything with her Cricut.