
THIS IS MY STORY

Replant Wife Team



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About the Authors

The Replant Wife Team is a group of women in ministry, both pastor wives and ministry wives, who exist to equip and encourage wives whose husbands are Replanting or Revitalizing a declining church. We understand the sacrifices to self and family that are made to ensure the stability of God's Church. We espouse the Replant motto of Preach, Pray, Love, Stay - all the while knowing that at times loneliness creeps in, overwhelm looms large, and the urge to give up is strong.

We are neither bible scholars nor ministry experts, but we are strong women of the faith who have been molded and stretched by being in the trenches of Replant and/or Revitalization.

We are here for you. We pray regularly for you. We know the Lord has equipped you for this ministry and want to encourage you to keep going. We pray that this book, each chapter a snippet of our time in ministry, builds you up and reminds you that you are not alone. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says, "Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, as you are already doing."

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1

Jesus is Mine

by Joyce Jackson

[Testing... Testing... Testing...] Entry into ministry life began with my wedding and a cross-country move to California, where my new husband, David, was an Associate Pastor, Teaching Fellow, and Seminary student while I worked in a doctor's office and insurance agency.

To begin my journey, I took spiritual gifting tests to see *what I could do for God*. Have mercy, I was so naive, hopeful, determined, distracted, and unprepared. But don't we all start this way? My focus on externals needed a perspective shift. God knew that first, He needed to prepare my heart to tune into Him in a deeper way.

Looking back across 40+ years of ministry it is evident that every turn in the road, every long dry path, every challenge - especially the challenges - were God's hand doing what only God could work out in this human heart. When times were hard, I often clutched temporary comfort in situations or even in the hope of a path ahead that promised security. But like borrowed jewelry, those baubles are only shiny for a brief time. God was recreating, refinishing, retooling, and refining me, and using ministry experiences to accomplish it.

Aside from taking spiritual inventory tests, there was a very human test worth mentioning because it turns up again and

again in the lives of those in ministry. I was tested by someone who didn't want me to succeed. Immediately upon arrival as a newly minted pastor's wife, I was drafted into a leadership role in an area where I had no experience. I had never even attended a meeting for this group, and I predictably and magnificently failed. Frozen in my ignorance, I was mortified that I wasn't somehow transformed into a powerful, or at least, adequate leader. What looked like a gesture of good faith, without any preparation, was a firecracker with a lit fuse. The result was that the person's attitude towards me was (or seemed) justified because I dropped the ball. I have a sneaking suspicion that if I had pulled it off, it still wouldn't have been done "the right way." Still, I do recognize that God was working on their heart and molding them as well. God used this opportunity to teach me about people, their expectations, and to say that I'd pray about it before saying yes.

The truth is, every person in ministry will be tested or challenged. And not everyone in church will want you or your husband to succeed. This is where you must stop and listen to God's voice. What is His leading? Did He ask you to take on this role or task? You can only serve one master...it isn't them and it isn't you. Discerning God's voice is the only way forward. He uses these

times of testing to strengthen your dependence upon Him and your determination to follow His path with integrity and compassion.

It is particularly challenging when there is a concerted effort over time to undermine your husband's ministry and weaken the church. When you are facing your own Sanballat and Tobia, do as Nehemiah did. They mocked and ridiculed him, tried to trap him, and threatened him and the faithful workers. He prayed, refused to be called off mission, prepared his people for conflict, and ultimately gave glory to God for completing the wall.

David and I have experienced only a few of these challenges, but have seen that it is predictable in every ministry. It does seem the more is being accomplished for the Kingdom of God, the harder the hit. During those times when you are being tested or judged unfairly, remember that it's not you. No really... It's not you! Those who are challenging you don't know you. They only know the version of you that they have concocted in their minds. And they aren't considering God's input. So, when you are tempted to ask, "Why am I in this trench of trouble?," the answer is rooted in their dented soul. It could be a defensive mechanism, or control, or fear, a maladaptive disorder, or even the devil

himself. It isn't your responsibility to fix them; Jesus is their Redeemer. It is your responsibility to pray, listen to Jesus, speak the truth in love, and to protect your family and church. Know that Jesus is always working things for your good, either to stretch you or to teach you how to say no. Things may not always feel good, or even be good, but God can work in these circumstances to bring about His good purposes. This is a lesson learned in layers and deepened at each challenge.

Thirdly, we experienced a test of discerning God's will. We thought that we knew what God wanted. But our opinions about His practical and specific will for our lives unfolded like bad origami when the mission center in Japan, which we thought God was directing us towards, froze all hiring. Our big plans dissolved. Did we mishear God? That was a scary thought! When you don't know the next turn, it is important to stay on the path where God has directed until you hear from Him again.

God gave me a precious example of this one Wednesday night. We were gathered in the small Southern California church where David was the pastor. A frail elderly saint, Lucille Sterkel, was in mid-prayer when an earthquake came rumbling through. Her voice shook even more than usual, but she kept praying and

prayed us right through the shuddering and rumbling. What a lesson! Stay on mission. Stay in communication with God. Don't move on until God says you are done. While we thought we were in wait-mode, God had things for us to learn about ministry, about church folks, and about life before the next turn in the road.

Testing builds the spiritual resolve to know that God is for you. He even designs the challenges and struggles to build you up. My ministry assignments ranged from bouncing babies, teaching children, challenging teens, choir, adult Bible studies, hospital visits, prayer, and administrative work. God's assignments sometimes fulfill our gifting, sometimes stretch us for our own growth, and sometimes allow us to hold the door for others to step into God's calling. You can rest in knowing that Jesus will work all things together for your good, if you are on His agenda.

[New England - Roots before Shoots] The next turn in our ministry road led us diagonally across the nation from Southern California to New England, where we began our church-planting adventures. Nothing happens in a hurry in New England. This was a particular challenge for my type-A husband. Thankfully, we both knew that God had called us to this place for these people. New England values history and

small community culture, and until we understood and connected on local terms, we were like an unrooted seedling. Thankfully, ministry leaders had walked before us and shared lessons learned. We are so grateful for those who paved the way like Ignatius Memarus, Larry Martin, Gabby Ohanian, Neal Davidson, Bob and Susan Brindle, Bill Jenkins, and many faithful pastors who worked the rocky and often icy soil before us, encouraged us, and showed us how to put down roots for God's church.

One illusion I had about church planting was the idea that a new church would begin with a clean slate of ideas about what church should be like. Instead, every person brought their own ideas (especially if they didn't realize they had them) of how a church should look, function, and be organized. The image of herding cats comes to mind. Getting everyone on the same page, moving in a remotely similar direction, was one of the first hurdles of a New England church plant. Thankfully, we learned to ask, "What does God want?" If we honored God, then what He wanted for His church would emerge.

And it did emerge, rarely in the predictable human-effort manner we would like, but God would present an opportunity and if we were ready, we could move with

Him, and His church would surge forward. During our season there, we planted two churches while assisting and encouraging many others who were planting in New England as well.

[9-11 in Maryland] God knows what is coming! After a decade in New England, God moved us to Maryland just months before 9-11. We lived so near the National Security Agency and Fort Meade that we learned to maneuver around military events and traffic patterns. Many people in our churches and lives were directly affected by the 9-11 attacks. As a church-planting regional coordinator, David also served as an interim pastor for churches in transition. Learning what they needed to know and how to take action was preparation for the future. It was a beautiful thing to watch God bring together the resources needed for His church, usually just in time. Prayer, communication, and connection with other churches, often through denominational bridges, made provision possible. Lone Ranger ministers usually burn out. Connection is a lifeline.

During 9-11, there was an exceptional illustration of God getting things ready, before we know the need. A faithful church member who worked in the Pentagon explained that normally she did not carry cash as it wasn't needed for parking or for

ordering lunch, etc. But on September 11th, she oddly had a great deal of cash in her purse. As the morning tasks were underway, a deafening explosion rocked the building as the plane hit the Pentagon below her office level. Her team quickly checked on one another and began to search for a safe way out. Passageways were blocked and choked with smoke, but they worked together to scout for a route to safety. In fact, after they cleared the building, their office collapsed. Once safely outside, they discovered not only were they unable to retrieve their cars, cell service was also down, which meant that the cab drivers' payment system was not working. But our friend remarkably had enough cash to send all of her teammates home. It was such a small thing for God to do, but in the moment, it meant everything for their families and gave testimony to God's provision. God shows His gracious provision in the midst of the darkest of times.

David and I settled into our new God assignment, purchasing a home in Maryland near his family that would be suitable for our retirement. We rested in the comfortable idea of a known future. I worked at the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware, so we were both very plugged into ministry across the Mid-Atlantic states. God was good. Ministry

was good. Life was good. And then came a cancer diagnosis for me with surgery and follow-up. One year later, David had a heart attack requiring a stent bridge. I'd like to tell you how brave I was. I certainly prayed like never before, but brave wasn't the tone of my prayers. Now I can see that God used those events to peel our white-knuckled grip off of our lives. Because suddenly we knew that we didn't know what the future would hold. We only knew that if we kept up with God, He would make a way where there was no way. He would provide the resources for as long as we needed them.

[New England – Climate Change] God redirected us back to New England through a message that was our own Macedonian call. Our first New England tour of duty had seasoned us and prepared the way for effective ministry. We also found that in the 14 years we were away, the spiritual climate had changed. People were hungry for the gospel, tired of religion without God, and looking for an authentic church experience.

We had also learned that in ministry, you could either build a ministry empire or be a part of the Kingdom of God. One required effort and control. The other required trust and constantly asking God what He was up to and how He wanted us to connect with His movement. God worked in

amazing ways by starting new churches and expanding existing ones.

[The Covid Transition] And then Covid! We lost neighbors, friends, and four close family members in 2020. For all of us, it was tempting to ask God if He knew what was going on down here. I certainly did. Is God good even when life isn't? In the midst of the worst times, God showed grace. He moved the broken pieces around to provide a path forward. I still don't understand. But I know that God does. And I know that God is good.

The sorrowful hurricane of that season is too long to unpack here. It wasn't neatly packaged or dealt with in manageable events. Each loss brought its own torrent of trouble that complicated the others. I'm mentioning this because we need to remember that pain and trouble does not mean that God doesn't care, that we have fallen from His favor, or that our place in His plan is gone, even when our prayers are seemingly unanswered.

Deep lessons emerged during that time. There is a temptation to close in and cling to the grief as if the pain keeps us connected to our lost loved one. Instead, it keeps us tied to the loss and does not allow us to honor and celebrate the life of the one that we love. One of the most magnificent and eventually freeing lessons is that there is

more room to love in a broken heart - when we invite Jesus into the midst of our pain. He brings light. Light always seems too bright when we have been in darkness. But light brings healing. Morning light of the sun (and morning connection with God) literally rewires the brain for a wakeful life. Light therapy can heal the wounds of the body. Likewise, God's light remodels the wounds of our soul. And just like Vitamin D from the sun eases pain and lifts our mood, God's light nourishes and lifts our souls, when we spend time in His presence. It also isn't possible to heal fully without community. We were meant to bear one another's burdens and to let others lift our burdens too.

During Covid, churches pivoted to ministry without walls. People either disconnected or reinvented their social world. And David's ministry assignment shifted to focus on Revitalization and Replanting up and down the Eastern seaboard. This allowed us to move far enough south to leave our snow blower behind.

Now, as David steps into an interim position, my role is to pray, to listen, and on occasion to speak the truth with kindness. I may help with a ministry task, but I'm cautious not to create expectations for the incoming pastor's wife. Sometimes I'm able

to undo some of the existing expectations that are unhealthy. When the yarn thread of old expectations begins to unravel, some will try to re-knit it in frustration. Others may need a listening ear concerning past pain before they can move forward with a new perspective. Instead of holding an official position, I serve as a doorkeeper in the house of the LORD. My mission is to hold the door open for new visitors and for new directions in the church.

Here in our new South Carolina homeland, church culture is so ingrained that people and ministries automatically do what they have routinely done for generations. Even struggling churches have trouble seeing the need to adjust their sails so they can move forward with God. Churches desiring to grow in maturity, ministry, or mass, need to ask God who He created them to be currently, where He wants them to go, then, with that in mind, together with God and one another, decide how they need to alter their sails to get there. Mindset directs ministry; we must seek the mind of Christ.

The focus isn't necessarily bigger, instead it is more targeted. In fact, NAMB's book Falling in Love With Jesus Again helps individuals and churches reassess their core commitment to Jesus. Churches across the nation are using this tool to strengthen their

own people. This allows ministry to flow from authentic relationship. Materials are available free with the link at the end of this chapter.

The primary personal take-away of the past 40+ years of ministry is that God loves, cares for, and is acting on my behalf. Jesus is mine! I'm more than useful, I'm loved. And when you are loved and know God is for you, there are no boundaries on your ability to walk in God's plan. God's plan is good, so much better than our own ideas. God planned you even as He designed Eden. The Creator of the universe yearns for an authentic, connected relationship with you. You were created for this time, in this place, with these people, because He delights in you, not just what you do. You are an amazing human! Only you can speak into the lives of those around you from your particular personhood. And that's what really counts. That's what you get to take into eternity.

Access the teacher and student materials by going to:
www.fallinginlovewithJesusagain.com
or scan the QR code.



Falling in Love With Jesus Again by David Jackson

2

Perfect Submission, Perfect Delight

by Darlene Dryer

Living the Hymn “This is my story; this is my song!” This part is easy to sing. It is more like a battle cry! Yes, let me air all my grievances. Let me gain your sympathy! As someone bent towards justice, I feel the need to present my case to the world. Maybe you too have this internal story that needs to be belted from the roof top. Fanny Crosby, author of *Blessed Assurance*, intimately knew struggles in life as she lost her sight at six weeks old. When we follow her to the next line of this hymn, we have cause to pause... “Praising my Savior all the day long!” Well, this part seems harder. Does it to you? I mean, can the latter happen simultaneously as the former? I think it can be done with some practice and reflection!

We read in Matthew 28:17, “When they saw him, they worshiped, but some doubted.” The disciples show us the ability to worship even if we do not understand. They had the CHRIST before them and still doubted. But they knew to worship through the confusion. Maybe it is okay for us to praise our Savior even when we don’t understand what He is doing with our story as pastor wives! Hey, maybe that is why our story is hard. He wants us to learn the art of worshipping through our hurt, confusion, and disbelief (that Christians can behave in such ways).

Fanny later said she did not wish for sight as it would have changed her perspective, and she looked forward to the first face she would behold - Jesus’.

Joseph said he knew that what his brothers meant for evil, God meant for good. How do we, like our predecessors, learn to praise God in, or from, the hard places? Fanny used the second stanza to give us insight into her transformation. It reveals her ability to go from a battle cry to praise!

“Perfect Submission, Perfect Delight.”

I believe the secret to the journey of praise is in the details of submission: the heart surgery that goes into surrendering it all to the Lord and the trust that one gains in the process. There is no way around it, we must go through it. God did not change Fanny’s circumstances; she remained blind until she met Jesus in Heaven. Joseph was sold, imprisoned, lied about, and abandoned before he could see God’s hand in all his suffering. The lucky part for us is we can borrow their conclusion of submission and delight to help us fight for the same ability to praise our savior all the day long. A few scriptures that come to mind when looking at submission:

James 4:7, “Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Luke 9:23, “Then he said to them all, “If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.”

1 Peter 5:6-7, “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you.”

And maybe the best one, the example Jesus Himself gives to us is Mark 14:36, “And he said, “*Abba*, Father! All things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but what you will.”

In my role as a Christian Counselor, I hear things on repeat. There is a part of every session where I do some biblical teaching, and before I can finish, the client will say

something like, “Darlene, I understand the truths of the Bible, but WHAT DO I DO?!” My heart goes out to them because they want the pain to stop, the hurting to go away. They want a magic button to heal. I do too!

The truth is there is no quick fix, however, something must change and many times it begins with us. *We can't change people, we can only change how we respond to them.* A lot of our suffering as pastor wives have to do with other people's sin and conflict. There is no magic button, no circumstance altering, no situational modifications that we can do. So now what? We are left with changing how we respond to people.

The response needing to change is not necessarily an outward response. Over time and self-preservation tactics, we as pastor wives have learned on the field of this “battle cry story” to tame how we react to others in public. Am I right? We learn to take a lot of heat. But behind closed doors and mostly in our heart, we must change the way we respond to others. This brings me back to the original question, “What do I do?!”

In the Scriptures above we learn as one submits, there is an additional action. James says to resist the devil. Proverbs says do not rely on yourself. Luke says to deny yourself. Peter says to cast your cares on the Lord. And Mark says not my will, but the

Lord's will. In submission there is nothing taken, but everything given freely. The choice is ours to make. What we do behind closed doors, and in our heart, will reflect our level of perfect submission and return our perfect delight.

My hope in this chapter is to encourage you in your journey to submit to the Lord what you have not yet given so that you can have perfect delight in the Lord's plans for you. Learn from my mistakes and feel free to join me in the recovery process.

Early Encounters: Ministry Roots and First Callings

Pastor wives are my ministry! I am a third generation pastor wife. We don't breed pastors; we breed women who marry men in an industry (Army, Veterinary, Aerospace Engineering) that can offer us white picket fences! Then the Lord calls them into ministry. We, the brides, start out with ideas of financial stability and comfort. Our "Perfect Submission" lessons began with giving up expectations early on.

Lucky for me I had heard of my grandmother's story and watched my mother's story play out. Grandma Stewart married a man in the Army, serving until retirement. She was looking forward to a life of ease when the Lord called him to serve, and give up his retirement for the ministry.

The Lord asked them to serve in small dying churches in the northeast. Sometimes they were given a parsonage and sometimes that looked like a classroom off the gymnasium. Grandma Stewart submitted to her husband, her Lord, and ultimately had “Perfect Delight” as she reflects on her life now.

I also got to live through my mother’s sacrificial life to ensure that the Lord got her first fruits in all things. My Dad was in school to be a veterinarian when he was called to serve the Lord. Mom had her passion for nursing and enjoyed her work. But it quickly became our family’s financial stability when dad went to seminary and served in churches that could not always pay fulltime. Dad often worked two (if not more) jobs at a time. Mom worked mostly as a full-time night shift nurse. She later told me that if she was going to work, she was going to take the most lucrative shift. I thought that was great advice. I can see how that helps me make some decisions in my own ministry life. My Mom was an example of graceful living, never complaining, enthusiastically serving in the church band, leading children’s church, and serving as a Sunday School teacher. She was also the director of Girls in Action and Acteens among all the other things that we know pastor wives do. She blended life and

ministry so well. One of my sisters did not even know she had a job outside the home until she was in sixth grade! My mother served in country churches, city churches, on the island of St. Croix and then back to the mainland again. Recently, I took her to a pastor wife conference with me. Her encouragement to other younger wives, “It was hard, but I would do it all over again in a heartbeat!” I am not sure if there is another phrase that could encapsulate “Perfect Submission, Perfect Delight” any better.

Here is how I ended up as a pastor’s wife - I went to college for Deaf Education and changed my major four times. I ended up graduating with a Fashion Merchandising degree from the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City and a Bachelor’s in Business Administration from Flagler College in St. Augustine, FL. I married Josh when I was in my senior year, and he was finishing his Master’s degree in Human Factors and Systems Engineering at Embry Riddle Aeronautical University (he is brilliant) - we were headed for NASA! Because what else would you do with a pilot’s license, a psychology degree and an engineering degree? Well, that was our plan. “Houston, we have a problem!”

Educational Shaping: Learning to Listen and Lead

The Lord called us that summer to vocational ministry, and instead of outer space, we accepted a call to start seminary at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary at their Jacksonville, FL campus. I started working in real estate, using my mother's advice of making the most you can in the hours you are given. We took a job as youth pastor and custodian at a little country church. This is where I learned to humbly hug toilets, love the old ladies that shoved candy wrappers in the pew for the cleaners to find, and realized there is no need for glass anything in a church if we are also going to have children in the building. Glass is a magnet to kids; they will find it and break it! I also learned from the youth that "dippin ain't smokin" so it is fine and that potted meat is different from spam! Good times!

From there, we began planting churches for the Jacksonville Baptist Association and had a baby! We were told we could not have children biologically, and that held true for four years. I was teaching a bible study in a Pilates studio. By the end of that study there were four of us young ladies that were pregnant. Needless to say, the next study was held at a Starbucks!

When Josh graduated with his M.Div., we were serving at a church in St. Augustine Florida, where we met and he was ordained.

Being there felt like home. We grew up there in a way. Being back felt comfortable. However, the Lord laid it on our hearts for Josh to pursue more education. You see he came to Christ at 20 and started seminary shortly after. He was in classes hearing bible stories and truths for the first time. The more he learned the more he wanted to learn. So, we packed up our little family and headed to Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary for more school, oh but not before having Baby #2!

After living on campus for a year, we felt called to missions and felt like going back to Josh's hometown of Dubuque, Iowa would be our next station of service with the North American Mission Board. You see Josh was raised Roman Catholic and his hometown was 97% Roman Catholic. A huge task of sharing the gospel laid ahead of us. And why not have baby #3 in our poorest, most busy years? So, we did that too. Josh was working four jobs, planting a church, and going to seminary again. This time he was getting his Doctorate in Church Planting from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. I think it was at this point I realized his hobby was education. I thought to myself there are worse hobbies, so I'll be happy to support his desire to learn.

After that calling, we headed to Florida again. This time the Lord asked us to be in a teaching role. Josh took a job at the Jacksonville Baptist Association as the Church Planting Strategist. I had the fantastic opportunity to pour myself into all the planter wives, pastor wives, and replanter wives. Josh did more schooling at Midwestern to get his Ph.D. in Missiology. While I was working with the pastor wives of Jacksonville, I surveyed them to see how I could serve them best. Their main concern was that they felt ill-equipped to do the job next to their husbands. There was this expectation that they needed to have all the answers as if they had gone to seminary as well. After a little more digging and questioning I found that they really wanted training on how to deal with the women that stop them in the hall and lay their heart out. How do you respond to the trauma that is shared with you? So, I went to research the best training I could and found the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors. It was exactly what they were looking for. I took the classes and it was exactly what I needed. The personal heart surgery that takes place in this type of study is nothing short of miraculous. I found myself, like my husband: the more I learned the more I wanted to learn. So, I enrolled at the

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
for a Master's in Counseling.

After four years of coaching at the Jacksonville Baptist Association, we wanted back in the game! We longed for boots on the ground action. We love change, challenge, and making pennies stretch if you haven't noticed yet! So, the Lord saw fit to call us to Key West, Florida, where we got neck-deep in our first Revitalization. I have found that Josh and I are weird birds because not everyone rejuvenates with change; most actually, grieve it. Maybe, I watched my grandmother and mother move so much, I did not know there was any other option. Maybe, I loved the re-creation of myself with every move. Or maybe, this is the way the Lord wired me so that He could use me apostolically. I could go into a new place and start a new ministry and then move and do it again. But for this move I think God used my free spirit to get me there and then chose to use my time in Key West to refine my spirit with a little grit as we had to coach others through change after change.

Ministry in Key West: Serving at the Edge of the Map

I often say that being a pastor's wife is the best built in accountability. Others say it is like living in a fishbowl, with a side eye of

annoyance. Let me present a reframing of the mind regarding the fishbowl theory. The fishbowl is a gift to us. Our sanctification process is expedited and illuminated on a stage for all to see as pastor wives. How can we, like Paul, have a platform for others to emulate if not for the fishbowl? Paul says in 1 Corinthians to imitate him. In Philippians three he says it again, and in chapter four says whatever you have heard and seen in me, practice this. It is the best built-in accountability the Lord could have designed for me. I count it all joy and a privilege to have been invited into the calling alongside my husband and children. But there was a process to get to this point. Charles Spurgeon says, "I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages." I feel this deeply regarding being a pastor's wife. I have learned to kiss the fishbowl, the unwanted parenting suggestions, or the passive aggressive comments about my husband. They have all taught me to care only for the One who sent me. The waves have taught me to listen to Him and not the comments. The facility damage and the parsonage conditions taught me perspective and to release expectations. The process I believe Fanny Crosby knew all too well. Our circumstances do not have to change for us to praise the

Lord. This is the process of “Perfect Submission, Perfect Delight!”

Key West was an interesting place to live geographically. It was closer to Cuba than to a Walmart. We were at the bottom of a trail of bridges that connected us to the mainland by about two and half hours. There was health care but offered in more of a triage situation. Everything was expensive. There was no two-day shipping. This tells us we were remote. Many things were run by a few families - the good ol’ boy system. This tells us we were rural. But we were 25,000 people on an island that was two miles by four miles wide with a high homeless population. This tells us we were urban. We had multiple military bases as well, so we were a political hub. We had over nine languages in our church and even more on the island. Key West is a melting pot. When following Paul’s teaching of, “I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some,” it becomes a daunting task to a diverse and transient community.

Key West was a place where people ran to. They seemed to be trying to start over by running away from demons in their life that ended up following them down there: domestic abuse, addiction, careers that were overwhelming. You name it, we heard it. There were limited resources for

our people for counseling. My husband was receiving more and more requests for counseling. As his help-meet I felt the calling to start a formal counseling center for the women of our church. This meant I went back to school to get a Doctorate in Counseling. I am not bent toward compassion or empathy. However, this equipped me to serve with tools to help many women to feel the love of Jesus Christ, be healed by the Holy Spirit, and live a changed life not as a victim but as victorious daughters of the most High King!

Submitting to this ministry I had to admit where I was weak and seek God to be glorified through His strengths. In our first eighteen months serving, Josh and I were involved in three cases to put men behind bars for sexual abuse. One of the oppressions of the island was promiscuity, sexual sin. It was flaunted, encouraged, and normalized. We were there with fresh eyes to say this is not okay. As a result, we had to put in place very strict policies to protect the children. One would think or see cause and effect. But there were many complainers and rebels when it came time to implement change. Requiring two adults in rooms with children, adults not texting with children in church if they were not related to them, removing teens from serving with children,

all caused great distress to the congregation during business meetings.

As pastor wives we have the privilege of knowing more details than the average attender. However, I still struggled with how people could not see this as a step in the right direction considering the present issues. Submitting the time it needed to make changes was a lesson learned here. No matter how much information we gave people, there were always going to be slow adaptors, and change would take time. The five stages of change are precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. Over time I could start to recognize the stage of change people were in. I was able to help them to the next phase with gentleness, by answering questions, showing them actual problems, or even just listening to them grieve the change. This was not always the case. I was a more of “my husband’s way or the highway” kinda gal. But the extra step to bring people along in a unified manner paid off. The more they saw Josh make changes, and the education that came with it, the easier it became to make changes in the future. Not because the congregation jumped on board without hesitation, but we learned the art of walking them through the stages of change and how to be unified for the end goal.

On the note of change, the church aesthetics had not been updated in twenty-five years. This is not that long in church years, however the building had gone through many hurricanes in this time. Mold, mildew, and termites had all been living in the facility simultaneously for some time. A face lift and a good airing out was needed. The first stage was to purge the library. We needed this space to be multipurpose. When we arrived, this room was filled with books with no supervision. Auntie died, so the family brought her book collection to be donated to the church, and many more similar stories like this kept the shelves double stuffed. Not the good kind of double stuffed like the Oreo. I was tasked to go through them for theological alignment. Myself and the most passionate member that was very resistant to any type of change started the process. To this day I am not sure why she agreed to help other than make sure I did not throw anything away. But it ended up being the best thing that could happen. When she saw the actual condition of the books with water lines on them, termite holes straight through the pages that look like bullet holes, and moldy aroma that made us take multiple breaks, she had to admit change was needed. What this taught me was sometimes people need to get elbow deep in a situation to see your point of view.

We needed this room to be multipurpose with toddlers in it during church. We needed it for counseling sessions during the week. And we needed it for a Sunday School class. This simple exposure exercise led the congregation to recognize that a face lift would not be so bad. So, I started a committee, because that is what good Baptists do to accomplish things. However, I called it a decorating team because with our new bylaws we worked in teams not committees. The team came up with a color scheme that would carry from the front of the church doors to the last door in the back of the church. We used historic colors to the island, natural fibers, and greenery that would be indigenous to the area. We picked out fonts for branding, and a 3-7-10 year plan for future updates. So much time and consideration was put into this by the team just to present it to the church. The church accepted the plan, but it did not come without some grumbling. After the meeting a member stopped me in front of the entire congregation and asked what makes me qualified to suggest this change, let alone pick out the colors. Mind you, the entire church up to this point was white. White trim, white walls, white doors, white tile floors, even the exterior was white with white columns and all. I'm not sure what he was trying to achieve, but my response was,

“I have a team and we made these choices together. But if you must know, I have a degree in fashion merchandising from FIT in NYC and what we just put together for you would have cost over \$10,000 in the corporate world and you just got it for free.” Now I could have put a little honey on that truth, but the sentiment is the same. You can be the most qualified in a topic, you might have sacrificed, you might be the only one that volunteered...there will always be grumblers. Our perfect submission starts with realizing our revitalization story is for the One who sent us, not the scoffers. If we wait for the perfect situation before we can have perfect delight, I’m sorry but it will never come.

I think I was ready, maybe not “ready” but aware, for the resistance to change that was to come from the church members. That is just a part of being human in the body of the local church. Over time I was able to see this was not a personal attack on us, though it felt like it, and they probably blame shifted their discomfort onto us. That was not fun but the tools I gained to deal with members in a loving way brings me “delight” in the Lord. It was a work the Lord could only do in my “Type A” heart. Key West squeezed me and revealed areas in my heart that I had yet to submit to the Lord. We got calls about every six months with

ministry opportunities to leave and with our apostolic nature, it was so tempting. But over and over we felt the Lord calling us to stay. With every opportunity decline our roots dug a little deeper into the rock we called home and our hearts grew tighter to the people in the church and outside the walls.

At the time, the Southern Baptist Convention was campaigning “Who is your One.” The idea was to pray for the Lord to reveal to you a person to share the gospel with every year. My first year in Key West I met a Muslim woman by the pool going through a divorce. In her brokenness, she listened to me and God called her to Himself. Her conversion was instant, but her discipleship took time, lots of time. By staying in Key West, I could see God work through her life, her continued submission for the Lord’s will in her life, and she is now an active member in the church - one of the most dedicated believers I know. She has become a spiritual sister and we have a bond that is so close it is hard to explain.

Another relationship that took time was with the Chinese. My family chose to love on the Chinese restaurant in town. We got to know the owner and the staff very well as we asked them to teach us new Chinese words every time we came in. I thought it would be fun to order new things

every time; we literally worked our way through the menu! One day I asked them what their favorite American meal was. They had been in America for decades and they had never had American food other than fast food. My mental wheels started turning and we got to work. Our church prepared a great traditional American Christmas meal for them and my family went to the restaurant at night after closing and shared a meal with all thirty staff AND shared the Gospel in English and Mandarin (through an interpreter, the owner's son). Then, I remembered our state had a dental van. We were able to bring it down and serve the staff of this restaurant. Over the course of many meals and years the owner started to bring her sons to our church events and now they have come consistently to Christmas and Easter. Recently, she reached out to me for some guidance, and I was able to give her a Bible in Mandarin. Time, it takes time.

One year I met a woman in the Dollar Tree during covid. Her anxiety was so high! I shared the gospel with her right there in the aisle! She is now our team lead for decorations and a dear friend.

The community, you see, became a source of delight. I had the good news, and through the Lord's power, lives were changing. The community was changing

because it was not just a Muslim woman who got saved. It was her whole family that came to the Lord by watching her transformation. It wasn't just a restaurant owner; it was all the staff. The lady in the Dollar Tree brought her whole family and her employees to a saving grace! Our rapport with the community was growing. People were coming in for counseling, and the local school was calling me for advice on their cases. We had a huge Vacation Bible School every year and the community would look forward to dropping off their kids. Our members were beginning to leverage their life for the gospel. The community was being impacted by the Word.

What I was not ready for was the resistance from the community when we made changes to our ministries. We had a daycare. From the outside it appeared to be a Christian school. But on the inside, the teachers were not believers, the school celebrated holidays most Christians would not recognize in their homes. For years we tried to change this dynamic from the inside out so it could be a "ministry." There was a long process to abide by the bylaws that church staff must be born again and members of a bible believing church. We as a church took every possibility to be a good witness, share the gospel, and preserve the

integrity of the local church for the glory of God. However, when this was brought to the teachers' attention, there was complete rebellion. There were many opportunities for this to be a calm situation, we had brought in a city staffer who was willing to find each one of them a job in the daycare field. However, they all walked out, and we had to close the school. This left the parents in a bind. But again, we had worked it out with other daycares to find where there were other openings for their children. So, you see, even if there are reasonable solutions, people will not like it because it involves change. The teachers and parents arranged a coup. They interrupted the next Sunday worship service during the children's sermon while all the kids were on stage. Some of the disgruntled parents charged the stage accusing my husband of false things, some were recording, some women were wagging their fingers in front of precious old ladies shouting at them that they were going to hell for throwing babies on the street. I grabbed my children and locked them in my husband's office. Something you should never have to experience. I ran back downstairs to see something miraculous. The congregation spontaneously unified against the protestors. They formed a line separating the mob from Josh. Another member corralled the

kids from the stage that had been separated from their parents, and slowly and calmly this line of church men and women pushed the demanding raging people to the foyer, and eventually outside. The newspaper was there to record and publish their side of the story which led to a frenzy of events. Our personal address was posted in the paper with horrendous lies about what we expected teachers to do. One of the lies was that we were going to start taking a 10% tithe out of their paycheck. I still have no idea where that came from. The entire town was calling for our heads. They demanded our resignation and said that we have no right to close a school down without the city's consent. A TikTok video of the situation that claimed my husband was evil went viral. It got crazy, and we got silent. We did not defend ourselves. We let God do that. With time everyone's child found childcare and all the teachers got new jobs. The wreckage they intended, God used for good. In the midst of the storm, we clung to Joseph's story and that He would work it out for His glory.

Now that we are on the other side, I can tell you it was marvelous to see the hand of God move. We had men step up to be deacons, security, teachers, ushers, greeters, and work in the kitchen like never before. They saw just how quickly situations can

change and this ignited the God given nature to protect. So they stepped up to the plate! We saw people watch us and our decision not to engage in the ridiculous newspaper and lawsuits that were threatened and in turn began to let God fight their battles in the home and workplace as well.

To learn peace in a storm is irreplaceable. The peace did not come instantly, as the storm tarried. I learned it through everyday giving it to the Lord. Submitting everyday against my flesh that wanted to lash out. A result of giving it all to the Lord was we had an epic number of salvations in the months to come.

Our church walked together through persecution and responded well. We are all more sanctified. I have learned to kiss the waves, kiss the fishbowl, kiss the persecution, because without them I would not be where God wants me spiritually today.

We don't have to deny the hard, it is our story - it is our song. However, learning that we are not submitting to the congregation, or the community, but to God and his Kingdom work helps us find that perfect delight. I learned to praise my Savior all the day long in Key West as we walked through life with our people on this small island we called home.

When the Lord chose to move us to central Florida to take an Associational position, we cried! We are still crying. We did not want to leave the people we learned to love. We didn't just mourn our church people, but the community too. As much as we had to fight against the worldliness of the island, our hearts broke for the hurting. We came to see that they behave the way they do because they need a Savior, just like we do. God used the people of Key West to shape us in ways we did not know we needed to be shaped. I had to give up parts of my personality, my preferences, my control. I needed to submit to God in all areas of my life in order to find delight. I'm not saying I have perfected Fanny Crosby's line on submission or delight. But what I can say is my story has brought me closer to the Father, because of my continued submission. I have learned to praise Him while in pain caused by church members, or the community He called me to, and I experience delight as I reframe my experiences from trauma to training.

3

Echoes of Mercy, Whispers of Love

by Kathy Addis

When I sit down and think about my journey to being a Replant Pastor's Wife, my first thought is, "How in the world did I get here?"

You see, I did not grow up in a Christian home, in fact you could say I grew up heathen. I heard things about church but they were rarely positive and certainly not something that sounded remotely fun to me. However, I did have a Grandma and Grandpa that loved Jesus and loved me enough to tell me about Him. As a little girl I would listen as they talked about Jesus because they seemed so excited about Him. I used to love to hear my Papa pray because he prayed in 'King James'. Wading through the "thee's and thou's" I only picked up on a few words that I understood but it seemed like he had this connection to God that he was so comfortable with and that relationship planted a seed of curiosity in me.

Fast forward a few years. That same little girl was now a very angsty teenager who was simply over it. I was scared, confused, lost, lonely and really mad about it. Life was too heavy for me to carry. The weight of a chaotic past that included serious poverty, abuse, and a crazy fear of the future threatened to destroy me. So, at the ripe old age of 19, I had decided I was all done. The plan was formulating for how

and when the end would come but I just had to survive one more summer at home between my freshman and sophomore year of college. “Home” was a relative term since I was, in fact, homeless. My mom and stepdad were scrounging for their own housing and had no room for me and my older sister who was finishing her sophomore year of college.

For me, His first ‘echoes of mercy’ came in the form of shelter that summer. A local pastor and his wife, Mr. Lloyd and Miss Suzy, offered to let us stay in their home with only two rules: don’t steal from them and don’t make them entertain us. Deal. I had a roof over my head and a bed to sleep in, even if I had to share it with my 20 year old sister. They never pressured us to go to church although I am certain it was obvious we needed it. Angie and I were spending the summer in that tiny town in north east Oklahoma, where we knew no one our age. We were raised with shaky morals but good manners. I just had to keep it together until school started in August then I could be done with all of it.

Enter His second ‘echoes of mercy’. Mr. Lloyd and Miss Suzy’s church, Eagle’s Nest Fellowship of Excitement, was holding a good old fashioned tent revival that summer. That entire week, all Angie and I could think was that those people were nuts!

It was July in Oklahoma! Of course it was 800 degrees in the shade and would drop maybe a degree once the sun went down. Ok, that is a slight exaggeration but it was HOT and yet night after night those faithful folks were there, singing and praising! We had not been raised in church and when we did go, it was to a Church of Christ so you can imagine this was very foreign and kind of scary behavior to us. We strategically avoided the revival and Miss Suzy all week. Then Friday, the last night of the revival came.

Miss Suzy caught us as we were sneaking out the back door. In her very sweet Southern way, she guilted us into going. Now, we were heathens but were also polite, so we went. Long story short, God met me there. Under that tent in the scorching Oklahoma heat I gave Him my all. My chaotic and filthy past, my pitiful present and my fear filled future. That night 35 years ago set my feet on a trajectory I could have never dreamt on my own. I gave Him a life full of regret and shame and He gave me hope.

I have never one day been without hope since then and it has changed everything.

I did finish that summer, graduated from Coffeyville Community College and went on to Fort Hays State University where

I met and married my beloved Andy. This is where His 'whispers of love' began to be evident.

When we met he was already a youth pastor at the church I began attending. I knew exactly nothing about ministry so when we married, I was not ready for the backlash from the youth group. I thought they liked me, and they did until I 'stole their pastor' from them. You see, as a single man Andy had not really put up many boundaries such as when events should end and times that were appropriate to call. As a married man, his time had become divided and they did not hesitate to show me how much they did not like that. Eventually, we were able to work out reasonable times for all of them to go home, and when it was completely acceptable to call and to maybe eat BEFORE they came to our house. It was a fun and exhausting time and I began to learn how to communicate with older adults, especially those who trusted us with their children.

From the small Kansas town where it felt like we knew everyone, we moved to Fort Worth, Texas to attend Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where we knew no one. This transition was made much harder by the fact that our marriage was very fragile and we had only each other to talk to. We were poor and every call to

anyone we knew was long distance and too expensive. God knew we needed that isolated time together to relearn how to communicate and to recommit not just to each other but to the ministry He had for us, whatever that was to look like.

It wasn't long before Andy was hired on as a youth pastor at a church on the west side of FTW. It was in a poor neighborhood that was growing over this aging, little church. When we started we had exactly one youth. God saw fit to grow this group to match nearly the size of the entire church which was super exciting to Andy and me but very intimidating to the elderly congregation. This legacy church had been around for nearly 100 years but had refused to adapt to the changing neighborhood. Needless to say, this caused a variety of conflicts with the deacons and other members. Andy was committed to invite any student that wanted to come and hear the Gospel, and despite some gritted teeth and hard, ugly conversations, our church went along with it. Change brought by growth was fine as long as it stayed within the youth group. We had only been there a few years before the senior pastor retired. Andy was voted in as senior pastor five days after I gave birth to our first son. We were 28 years old. I was nowhere near mentally, emotionally or spiritually ready for this

major transition in our lives. Naively, I thought it would be like being a youth pastor's wife but just with grown ups. I was very wrong.

We soon moved into the church's parsonage which was separated from the church by a parking lot. This was an easy walking distance from the church for anyone that wanted to just pop in completely unannounced. It felt like overnight the expectations placed on me quadrupled! I felt like everything I did was being scrutinized, which may or may not have been accurate but I was so postpartum it was hard to tell what was real and what wasn't. I knew this...it was hard. I found myself trying desperately to figure out how to be the perfect mom and perfect pastor's wife and was failing miserably at both. I was tired all the time and was constantly afraid a church member would "pop in to just say Hi" and see the disaster that was my house. When Noah was 28 months old we welcomed our second son, Nathan. He was brought home to that same parsonage. Life did not get easier but I am forever grateful for the one elderly deacon who stood up in a business meeting and told the people to stop 'surprising Kathy with an unannounced visit'. He bought me some freedom and room to breathe. I truly believed God was wanting to do something spectacular with

His church even though Andy had been up for a ‘vote of confidence’ (a very polite way of asking if they should fire him or not) six times since he had become senior pastor. Once was because he authorized the removal of the broken chandelier lighting in the foyer that according to an irate member, had been donated decades prior. They had not worked for years.

If I was going to have a quiet time with the Lord, I had to get up in the middle of the night to do it or it didn’t happen. We were growing personally and it was anything but easy. In all honesty, His ‘whispers of love’ seemed barely audible during this time. However, looking back I can see how He loved on us with some very solid, genuine friends that continually prayed with and over us.

The year Andy graduated from SWBTS, we began to feel the nudge to move back to Kansas. Neither one of us really wanted to live in Kansas again but we couldn’t shake the drawing. I wasn’t really fighting too hard since I just wanted to get out of where we were. We had friends, really good friends, that we still cherish to this day but the seemingly constant criticism of Andy and I both in addition to the unwillingness to change with the community had taken its toll. I wanted out.

Then came the call from a pastor's search committee from a small church in the middle of nowhere Kansas. We kind of dismissed it at first because Andy had been offered some 'big money' from a couple of 'big churches' in the DFW area. We both knew they were not where God was calling us but it felt good to be wanted. The more this little church in Hutchinson, Kansas talked to Andy, the more it became very clear to me that was where God was taking us. He also made it clear that I was only to pray for Andy to hear His voice and to keep my confidence quiet until he came to the same conclusion. This was not easy because I'm his wife and he should listen to me, right? Thankfully, God helped me keep my thoughts between Him and me. His 'whispers of love' began to grow louder and louder.

In October of 2001, we drove to Hutchinson and came in view of a call to this legacy church that was started by some beautiful men and women who were still there and were willing to do what it took to grow. It took 13 months for all the details to be worked out and for Andy and me to be released to move from Ft. Worth. I believe part of the reason it took so long was because I needed to ask for and offer forgiveness to some individuals there. By His grace we left with no animosity and

were free to look to the future with excitement and honestly, maybe a little apprehension.

Westbrook Baptist Church welcomed us with wide open arms. They loved on my boys, listened to my husband and very gently lavished grace on this very wounded and scared wife and mom. I was paranoid like a whipped pup, constantly waiting for the proverbial other shoe to drop. Nearly 24 years later, it still hasn't. More 'whispers of His love'.

Westbrook had a normal attendance of around 70 people when we moved here. They were primed and ready to grow because this older congregation prayed for it and were obedient to follow even when they didn't understand what God was doing through their new, very young 31 year old pastor.

Changes began to happen when we outgrew our traditional Southern Baptist building and decided to copy the pattern of a big church in the Kansas City area that had a 'satellite church' service at a different building on the other side of KC. This seemed insane to pull off in a town with a population of 40,000 people. Two church buildings in a small rural town, who would think of such a thing? 'Echoes of mercy' began to ring through our little church as we became the church with a second venue,

aptly named “Venue 302” because that was its address on 30th street. Within the same time frame we had a major change that was harder for some of our founding folks. We needed a name change. Westbrook was named for the location of that original building (Wesbrook Street on the west side of town) and it didn’t offer any room for the new Venue 302. It didn’t help that a very controversial ‘church’ in another part of our state which held a very different theology, beliefs and values had a frighteningly similar name, resulting in us receiving death threats because people confused us with them.

In 2010, Westbrook Baptist Church became CrossPoint Church. This is when I became a Replant wife and had no idea.

The name and title of Replant church may have been a thing back then but I had never heard of it and frankly, it didn’t matter. Life in this not so little anymore church was changing at what felt like breakneck speed. Not long after adding the Venue and the name change, we added a third location in a town about 30 minutes from here because of how many people were driving over each week to attend. That was exciting but my husband was suffering physically with debilitating headaches that we soon found out were from what is called Chiari Malformation. He underwent brain

surgery in August of 2009. This is when I saw ‘echoes of love’ in the form of our church rallying around us to meet every need we had. Despite Andy’s mandatory absence, our church continued to grow.

Then came the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth locations, all in towns a few miles or hours from our original church. This was such an incredibly exciting time for our church and for our family. Of course there were tense conversations and hard decisions were made along the way. The stress was mounting on my husband who found himself serving not only our local church but also our two-state convention as well as with the North American Mission Board. His time was so thin and travel was a must for him. He hated being away so much but we made it work with FaceTime and by God’s grace finding a rhythm for this life.

‘Echoes of His love’ for me in that crazy busy time were in the prayers and fellowship that I was very intentional about keeping in my life. God gathered three other ladies from our church with me to pray weekly for our church as we had begun the dreaded building program to combine the attenders of the once legacy church and the Venue. We met faithfully each week to pray for our church and our families. This was, and still is, a life line for me. They were,

and are, so good to spur me on towards love and good deeds and are not intimidated or enamored with my title of Lead Teaching and Vision Pastor's Wife. I can just be Kathy with them and I am eternally grateful for that.

One of the biggest struggles I have encountered personally on this roller coaster ride has been the question, what is my role? I was once just the pastor's wife which is anything but "just" but I knew that if it needed to be done, it was likely up to me. With this growth, and changing role for my husband, came the necessity for a Location Pastor and of course, his wife. "She" (there have been a few over the years) did a great job of meeting people and their needs. Some also participated in staff meetings which I had never done nor felt the need to do. "She" quite effectively did almost everything I had once been expected to do. I felt as though I had no purpose in my church. Andy was/is basically the 'preaching pastor' but the day to day workings of the campus had been delegated to our Location Pastor. I was lost.

This was heartbreaking for me. I know the enemy made more of it than it actually was but I allowed him to convince me that I was not needed or worse, wanted anymore. I stayed on the Women's Ministry and Prayer Teams which I had been leading for years,

but quietly resigned from all other ministries. I began to beg God to show me what He wanted for and from me at ‘my’ church. Slowly He transitioned me more to a broader scope of ministry outside the many walls of CrossPoint Church. I began working with our two-state convention to connect and encourage the Pastor’s Wives in our ten associations. This was exactly what I needed. As everything does, this ministry is also changing but His ‘whispers of love’ have allowed me to adapt and grow. I am currently still serving in the two ministries as well as the Tech Team at church. I have a wonderfully functional and cohesive relationship with our Location Pastor’s wife who sees, and appreciates, my years of experience here and I could not be more thankful to work and walk alongside her.

As for the story of this Replant, multisite, rural church (yes, they all seem like an oxymoron), God has seen fit to allow us to grow in six additional locations across the great state of Kansas bringing the total of CrossPoint locations to 14. We now have a God-sized goal of planting, replanting, or revitalizing 20 churches by 2031. Our oldest son, his wife and our grand baby attend with us and he serves as our campus Facilities Coordinator here in Hutchinson. Our youngest son and his wife were recently called into pastoral ministry and he serves

as our Location Pastor about half an hour from us.

This journey to being a Replant Pastor's Wife has been both beautiful and brutal, messy and merciful, fun and frantic, daunting and delightful. I wouldn't have it any other way. After all, if it weren't I would have missed His echoes of mercy and whispers of love.

4

(Im)Perfect Submission, All is (Not) at Rest

by Audrea Stewart

I've always considered myself a planner with big dreams. When I was a little kid I dreamed of being Wonder Woman or a ballerina. Unfortunately, my lack of super powers or any sort of dancing abilities quickly put a damper on those dreams. Later on, I talked about becoming a famous singer, publishing a novel, or becoming a successful Broadway actress. These were definitely plans on my dreams and aspiration to-do list and I even got a BFA in Musical Theatre to help me pursue my life on a big stage.

I also had a "not to do list". I specifically told the Lord I did not want to be a pastor's wife, a teacher, a missionary, or married to someone in the restaurant industry. Oddly specific list, I know, but as the saying goes, "We plan and God laughs." In 2004, I married my college sweetheart who was planning on becoming a chef before God called him to the ministry as a pastor, and later as a North American missionary. We had kids and I started working at their preschool as a teacher and later transitioned to homeschool mom when my oldest started kindergarten. My husband likes to say that he's "everything I never wanted" to which I respond, that "he is everything God knows I needed."

It was 2012 when the Lord first started stirring our hearts for Replanting. My

husband had graduated from seminary and was serving at a church in New Orleans. We loved our church and had a great community of friends. Our family was within driving distance, which was very helpful since we had three little kids who were 6, 4 and 2. We were very comfortable, but we knew God was calling us out of our comfort zone. However, we didn't know where He was calling us. My husband asked me where I'd like to go. I told him, "Oh, I'll move anywhere with you, sweetheart. But I'd really rather not move to Florida." In January 2014, we received a call from a church in Jacksonville, Florida. You think I would have learned to stop telling the Lord what I didn't want to do.

Hyde Park Baptist Church had been a thriving church in the '80's and '90's with attendance up in the 500's. Unfortunately, the neighborhood had changed around the church but the church had not changed with it. There were a few difficult ministry seasons and at least one church split. So in 2012 and 2013, when we were praying about where God was going to send us, Hyde Park was praying about how to be revitalized. Over the decades, their attendance had shrunk from a 500 member multi-generational congregation to 40 very discouraged senior adults.

Hyde Park reached out to the local Baptist Association for help and made the brave decision to merge with a larger church in the area as a campus until they could become healthy again. It was the larger church who contacted my husband once they saw his resume. So mid January 2014, we packed our three little kids in a rented mini van and made the hours-long drive for our interview and in view of a call weekend.

The interview weekend was stressful from the very beginning. Our kids had handled the 11 hour drive relatively fine, but everything came off the rails when we got to the hotel room. My three now feral kids were so loud, we received three calls from the hotel staff about noise complaints within 15 mins of walking in the door. My husband was still making multiple trips to unload the car when my four year old stripped off naked, danced in front of the open window, picked up the room phone and called 911. When my husband finished bringing the last of our bags, he asked if we'd gotten any more noise complaints. I told him I didn't know because I had unplugged the phone. To make matters worse, my heart was racing at this point. I didn't realize before we left New Orleans exactly how far away Jacksonville was from all our friends and family until we stopped the car and

unloaded all of our luggage. As much as I thought I was prepared to submit to wherever the Lord was calling us, this first night in the hotel room was giving me serious doubts. In this moment, all did not feel at rest. Instead this weekend was shaping up to be a chaotic nightmare.

The next day was filled with non-stop interviews for my husband and a surprise interview for me from the pastor's Administrative Assistant. This was an interview for which I was completely unprepared. Did I mention when I get nervous I cry? Obviously I was exhausted from not getting much sleep with three little kids who'd survived one of their first hotel visits, and this made tears come even faster. So there I was basically ugly crying in the church secretary's office when the senior pastor of the church who was hiring my husband walked in the door. He and the other staff members had been interviewing my husband all morning and were excited to meet me. Needless to say, I was mortified that our first introduction was me as a crying mess and I attempted to mumble a tear-strained hello.

I was sure I'd blown the interview for my husband and I drove my kids to the nearest beach, because I promised them they could see the ocean on this trip. This would have been a nice distraction, but it

was an unusually cold weekend of 30 degrees in January for Jacksonville. So I stood shivering on a beach watching my littles chase the seagulls wishing we could just head home to New Orleans.

It was at this moment that two of our best friends called. They were on their way from New Orleans to see us. They said that two weeks prior, the Lord had told them we would need them and they had planned to be there when we were in Jacksonville for support. Having dinner with them that night was so comforting and exactly what our hearts needed. However, this wasn't the only reason the Lord had impressed it upon their hearts to make the drive.

We got back to the hotel room that Saturday night to settle in before my husband preached at Hyde Park the next morning. At 10:00 pm the first kid started throwing up. At 11:00 pm the second kid started throwing up and at midnight the third kid joined in. It was a horror show but we made it through the night. Thankfully, our friends were able to sit with the kids so I could head to church with my husband.

We arrived at the church bleary eyed and exhausted having only had a few hours of sleep. I was convinced we were not moving to Jacksonville and that Florida was the worst state ever. I couldn't wait to pack up the rented mini van and head back home

to Louisiana. However something came over me as soon as my husband stood behind the pulpit that morning. I felt the Holy Spirit say, “This is exactly where you are supposed to be.” It wasn’t a perfect submission and I definitely did not feel at rest, but I had a sense that God was going to bless this ministry, even though I came kicking and screaming.

A popular song that was on the radio at the time was “Oceans” and the lyrics really spoke to my heart during those early days at Hyde Park.

*“You call me out upon the waters.
The great unknown, where feet may fail.*

*And there I find You in the mystery,
In oceans deep my faith will stand.*

*Spirit lead where my trust is without
borders.*

*Let me walk upon the waters,
Wherever You would call me.*

*Take me deeper than my feet could ever
wander,
And my faith will be made stronger,
In the presence of my Savior.”*

*(Houston et al.)

In Matthew 14:22-33, we see Peter called out by Jesus to walk alongside him into unknown waters. The disciples were sitting in a boat, their comfort zone, when they saw the Lord walking towards them across the sea.

25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.

26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

Matthew 14:25-31

Their first reactions were fear and then Peter responded with bold faith as he asked the Lord if he could walk out to meet him in obedience. Just getting out of the boat was a huge step of faith and submission for Peter. However, this act of faith didn't go perfectly. Peter immediately began to sink in the rough waters and had to call out to Jesus to save him. Jesus responded to him the same way he responds to us, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" as he lifts us back up into His steadfast arms.

As a Replant Pastor's wife, you may feel like your submission is anything but perfect and like Peter you are riding wave after wave in an ocean of chaos. You may be thinking to yourself, "Where is the 'all is at rest' that everyone sings about in Blessed Assurance, in my life?" I know God called me here, but I feel like I'm sinking! Here's the beautiful part. God meets you in your chaos. You may feel like you are drowning but He meets you in the sea of uncertainty and doubt. He sends friends to encourage along the way and gives you exactly what you need when you need it. Moving to Florida to help Replant a church on the Westside of Jacksonville was never on my to-do list, but it definitely was God's plan for me and my family. I did not feel equipped to the call, but God sustained our family during our time there and we saw some

beautiful things happen because we submitted to that calling and rested in Him. So keep walking in faith and singing His songs in your heart, dear friend, as God leads you and your family out upon the waves. He truly will take you deeper than your feet could ever wander and your faith will be made stronger. He will lift you up when your doubts cause you to sink. Your submission may be imperfect, but keep your eyes on Jesus and He will give your heart peace and rest.

*Houston, Joel, Matt Crocker, and Salomon Ligthelm. "Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)." Zion, Hillsong Music Publishing, 2013

5

**I in My Savior am
Happy and Blessed**

By Jeanette Pugh

When my husband and I moved into our first home, it was only a short walk from a small church on the corner of a busy intersection. After we settled in, we decided to attend their Sunday morning service. It did not take long before the Word of God spoke to our souls. We then made the most important decision of our lives by choosing to follow Christ. We have been passionate about the Lord ever since. We both grew in Christ and became active in ministry. I'm happy to say that our children grew up in that church. Over the years, Colin served as a deacon, youth leader, minister, youth pastor, and assistant pastor all in less than fifteen years. In our unawareness, the Lord was gently preparing us for leadership. On September 29, 2019, my husband was installed as the Pastor of Clinton Baptist Church in Clinton, Maryland, just a few miles outside of Washington, DC. Before his installation, the church had been without a pastor for nearly four years and was in desperate need of leadership. Although the sanctuary could seat over a thousand people, less than twenty attended regularly. By God's grace and through the vision He gave to Colin, Clinton Baptist Church was Revitalized, and since then the church has grown tremendously.

Colin answered the call to pastor with joy and anticipation. I, however, had been comfortable in my role as the youth pastor's wife at our previous church where I served in Awana and the children's church. There was not much expected of me beyond that, and I hid behind the fact that I did not carry much responsibility. Too often, I told myself there was nothing special about me because I didn't know my calling or purpose, especially in ministry.

When my husband was asked, "Are you ready to be a pastor?" he answered confidently, "Yes, of course." I, on the other hand, quietly wondered, Am I ready to be a pastor's wife? What will people expect of me? I wanted to be accepted by everyone. I asked a pastor's wife who had served alongside her husband in Chicago for more than thirty years, "What advice would you give a new pastor's wife like me?" She looked me in the eyes, placed her hand on my shoulder, and said, "Be yourself." Those two words spoke volumes. It is God who has placed me in this church alongside Colin. If I step into this role pretending to be someone I am not, I will have to keep up that front for years, and that is not fulfilling the calling that God has on my life. I had to be responsible for walking in my calling just as much as Colin did.

I did not grow up in church or in a religious household. I did grow up in a two-parent home where my parents worked hard to provide for my siblings and me. Their main concern was making sure we had food, clothes, shelter, and a decent education. We attended church a couple of times a year. From what I recall, the church in my mind was for Easter and funerals. My only church experience as a child was going with my aunt. I do not remember hearing the gospel, but I do remember receiving a quarter or two, on a good day to purchase candy after service at the convenience store across the street. That was the highlight of the day. As a teenager, eventually, the holiday church visits stopped. Since I was older I had a choice, and I chose to sleep in instead of going to church. Besides, I was too preoccupied with the distractions of the world, and the times I did go, I began to feel like I was being judged by those who made the sacrifice to attend every Sunday.

Jesus was the furthest thing from my mind. I was unsure of what my future was going to hold. My husband and I attended the same middle school. We had been acquainted for years. Even at 15, after having my first child, marriage was still not something I was sure about. With school, work, and a young child, my life was persevering but not fulfilled. My thoughts

changed not long after that when a close family friend was brutally murdered. For the first time, I seriously wondered what happens after death. At the funeral, I remember the pastor saying, "If you don't want to burn in hell, repeat this prayer." I did, word for word, hoping it would be enough to get me into heaven. But I did not fully understand what I had done. I was not disciplined. I never joined the church. I am grateful the gospel was presented, but it would be years before I truly understood what salvation was. When we finally joined the church in our community, I publicly professed Jesus as my Lord and Savior. I planned to attend once or twice a month, just enough to make sure my children were exposed to church culture. Like most moms I wanted them to be well-rounded children. However, God had other plans. We were there four to five days a week. I grew closer to Jesus and wanted to learn everything I could about Him. I wanted to know how to live as a Christian. I wanted to learn how to become a proper helpmate, and how to be a better mother and godly woman figure for my children. I never planned on becoming a pastor's wife, but as my husband grew in the Word, the Lord was quietly preparing me too.

I formed a close friendship with my pastor's wife. She served with poise and

gentleness. I had a front-row seat to her life. I watched, listened, and learned, all while making mental notes of what I would and would not do if I were ever in that position. I also witnessed the hurt and disappointment that often come with ministry. As a pastor's wife, you are able to witness weddings and divorces, births and funerals, growth and decline, new homes and homelessness, promotions and job loss, healing and health challenges. Ministry includes both joy and heartbreak. The highs and lows of life are why community and genuine friendship matter. I was blessed to be surrounded by other pastors' and ministers' wives. We spent time together, went on outings, and attended retreats. Lifelong bonds were formed, and it reminded me that I was not walking this journey alone (neither are you). God revealed to me that nurturing relationships is essential for a Pastor's wife. However, not everyone is your friend.

I've never considered the church to have a revolving door, but it's an essential aspect of its functioning. When my family came to Clinton, I met a long-time member with a caring spirit and a deep love for the Lord. She served faithfully and supported the ministry financially. She helped me settle in, introduced me to everyone, answered my questions, and sent encouraging messages throughout the week.

She often told me how grateful she was that we had come. She was married, but her husband attended another church. I prayed that one day he would join her in serving at our church. Months later, she shared that the Lord had led her to serve at his church. I knew it was the right decision, but it still hurt. I wondered if I had done something or said something wrong. That was the first time I truly learned that some people are only meant to be part of your life, or your ministry, for a season. Therefore in every season, reason, or circumstance, finding joy in your Savior, instead of people, will sustain you. In her case, I did not want to see her go yet God knows what's best. Even though I never spoke with her again, I'm so grateful for her being available during our transition.

We also had a member who treated people harshly and unkindly. She had no desire to live out our mission which is simply: We Grow. We Serve. We Love. Eventually, she decided that this was not the church for her. I didn't really mind seeing her go (besides the fact that she gave very nice Christmas gifts), but I still felt compelled to pray that God would give her a change of heart.

There was another member who barely spoke when she first joined and never prayed out loud. Recently, she called and

prayed for my husband and me for safe travels on a road trip. I was so appreciative that she overcame her shyness for just a moment to lift us up in prayer. She currently joins the prayer call faithfully every Sunday.

God is always working, even when we do not see it immediately. I praise God for allowing me to see the growth in the people He has placed around us, even if it's just for a season. God made it clear to me that members will come and go. My prayer is that when people are at Clinton they will grow in their faith, deepen their relationship with Jesus, and become disciples of Him. I pray that He gives me and you discernment along the way.

The phrase "I in my Savior am happy and blessed" means I have found deep and lasting joy through faith in Jesus Christ. This joy is not temporary or dependent on circumstances. It is a settled confidence that comes from living in submission to Christ. Although the weight of the world can get heavy, serving in ministry should never feel like a burden. It is an honor to serve God and His people. I totally get it, life is busy. I am a mother of four children. I remember them all being in four different schools in several extracurricular activities, while working full-time, trying to keep the spark in my marriage, and serving in ministry. At

one point, the joy I once had began to fade. I was serving out of exhaustion instead of overflow. I was rushing through responsibilities, becoming unnecessarily distracted, and even found myself complaining about ministry work as if God owed me something for serving.

I know God does not want me to live overwhelmed. He wants me to stay focused on Him, even in the busiest seasons of life. We must make time for God. He meticulously created us fearfully and wonderfully (Psalm 139:14). We are special in His sight therefore, He longs to spend quality time with you and me because we are His daughters. He chose us for this particular assignment. Think about it for just a moment. God chose your husband to lead His people, to teach His Word, to pray, to counsel, to guide, and to shepherd His church. Consequently, God also chose you to stand beside your husband, to support him, to handle his heart gently, and to walk with him through every season of ministry. I choose to serve God with joy and gratitude. Counting it a blessing that only Jesus can give, and I am thankful to serve in the role God designed for me. He has also blessed you, my friend and fellow Replant/Revitalizer pastor wife, to serve alongside your husband. Be confident in Christ your Savior. He knows what is best.

He created you for this calling. Your story has already been written. You are responsible for living it out. Appreciate what God has for you in every season and every moment. He's blessed you with your husband, family, and church. Be grateful, appreciate it, and take good care of what God has entrusted to you. Be happy in one thing, your Savior JESUS.

6

Watching and Waiting

By Barb Bickford

This is My Story...I've been in church since I was in utero. My parents both grew up in Christian homes and my dad had surrendered to the ministry as a teenager. I often wondered what it would be like to grow up in different circumstances but I'm thankful to not know. When I was eight years old I walked the aisle at the end of the church service to Just As I Am - mostly because my five year old brother had professed faith to my mom earlier that morning and I didn't want to miss out. It wasn't until I was 13, at youth camp, that I realized I had never actually given my life to Christ. It was then that I truly realized the sacrifice Jesus made for me and the importance of living my life for Him. He had been watching and waiting for me.

As I grew up, I knew that my life would involve ministry somehow. However, I was very vocal that I would not marry a pastor. That had nothing to do with my dad, but I had seen how difficult ministry could be - for the pastor and for his family. As a result, I had decided I would pass on that. Clearly this was not something I had prayed about, but I had let God know that it wasn't in my plans. Did you know God doesn't really ask our permission when He lays out our life plans for us? Obviously He already knew this was going to be a thing for me. Ha! It wasn't until I met this tall, dark, and

handsome young man in college that I began to change my tune. But he was studying Youth Ministry and was hoping to work at a camp! That sounded fun! He wasn't REALLY going to be a pastor. Ha again! I began watching and waiting to see what the Lord had in mind for me.

Half way through college, at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, MO, I married that tall, dark, and handsome young man. We volunteered together in the Student Ministry of the church where we attended and we loved it. We both taught high school Sunday School and served on Wednesday nights at youth group. This would be the beginning of a lifetime of ministry together, with more changes along the way than we could have ever imagined.

After graduation, we moved just outside of Kansas City to Independence, MO where Bob became the Student Pastor at Noland Road Baptist Church. That was a whole lot of fun (and hard work, late nights, and time apart after we had our first two babies). It was there that we learned serving on a church staff was actually not all fun and games - even in youth ministry. We were confronted with some very difficult situations that Bob did his best to shield me from, but they were painful nonetheless. In the midst of that, I was learning how to be a pastor's wife, unsuccessfully seeking help

from women farther along in life and ministry than myself, and becoming a mama to our first two kids. Even though I had friends in the church, I often felt alone and like I was not living up to whatever a pastor's wife was supposed to be.

After four years, God moved us onto the campus of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary so Bob could finish his Master of Divinity degree. During and after he graduated, he served briefly as a Worship Pastor at a new church plant in Blue Springs, MO. Due to some unforeseen circumstances that had nothing to do with us, that ministry stop was very short, as was the life of that church.

For a short time, Bob worked in a cubicle at an IT company in KC while we watched and waited for what the Lord had next for us. We hadn't been looking to move far away from our families but that's what the Lord had for us. So we packed up our little family and moved to south Texas where he served as the Student and College Pastor at First Baptist Church in Corpus Christi. I learned a lot about expectations in that church - some spoken, many not. I didn't really fit the mold of their idea of a pastor wife, but I stayed in my lane and really loved our time there. I taught 8th grade girls Sunday School and was probably more involved in student ministry than a

mom of small children should have been. Our kids loved it though - being friends with all the youth group kids. Throughout our time there we experienced a lot of highs and lows, some of which were me meeting my lifelong friend Ann, an infinite number of trips to the beach, buying our first home, losing a baby, getting our first dogs, having a baby, and being a part of God growing the middle school, high school, and college ministries. Even though there were times of great struggle in ministry there - due to old paradigms, and rigid barriers to change, we grew up a lot while we were there. We learned a lot about ministry, not just to kids, but to adults as well. That place holds a fondness in my heart.

After much prayer, our time in Corpus Christi came to an end and we moved to north Texas where Bob served on staff as the Associate Pastor at a seeker sensitive church in Garland, TX. We lived there for seven years. It was a much larger church than we had been in and the expectations for the pastor's wives were little. I still served in the Student Ministry as a small group leader and I taught 3rd grade Sunday School. But looking back, my service as a pastor's wife was unremarkable. I definitely missed some opportunities to serve women well. Our ministry there did provide lots of clarity for us in how we felt

the Lord wanted us to minister. This began a stir in our heart to see what else the Lord had for us.

As much as we loved Texas, we were presented with an opportunity to move back to my home state of Missouri. A friend from seminary who was pastoring a multi-site church in St Louis reached out and we began to ask the Lord if this was His will for us. After a period of seeking Him we discerned this, in fact, was the Lord's leading. It was a hard move for all of us for various reasons, but especially for our two oldest kids. One was in the middle of high school and the other was about to start. This kind of ministry was different than we had experienced before - multiple church campuses and more people in membership and regular attendance. I struggled to know what my place was there as a pastor's wife. Most of the time it was pretty easy to move about unnoticed. I focused on my kids and building relationships in our little town of Webster Groves.

Eventually Bob became the Lead Pastor at a church we Replanted in that little town we had grown to love, just next door to St Louis. By that time, the Lord had shaped and molded my heart, giving me a greater desire to build relationships with women inside and outside of church, especially young women. I had never had a mentor,

something I deeply desired, so I knew the value of being one and offering that to others.

When we were considering Bob becoming the pastor at the church in Webster Groves, God really had to do a number on my heart. Replanting was an entirely different animal from anything we had done in the past. I was unsure about how it would work out. I felt alone and incapable. I didn't know what my role would be. It was a great opportunity for me to watch what the Lord would do - in my heart and in the hearts of those in the church. It was also a great opportunity for me to learn to be patient since the work he wanted to do in all of our hearts took time.

As we began getting to know the members of our congregation, I began to get excited about this new adventure. The future was ripe with possibilities. We had a whole new group of people to love and grow close to - granted their ages were older than anyone we had ministered to previously - most of them the ages of our parents or grandparents. We were gung-ho anyway! Surely they would be on board with all of our exciting new ideas and since (as they had said) they were all willing to change and make changes within the church, we knew it was going to be smooth sailing! Except it wasn't. Everyone says they want change

until it shows up on their doorstep. I was not prepared for the about-face that nearly all of these seasoned saints took.

We didn't know what we didn't know. I didn't know any other pastor wives whose husband was Replanting a church. I felt a little like a fish out of water. But still, like I mentioned, I was excited for this great possibility to help this church turn around and not close its doors. It was another opportunity to watch and wait. What plans did the Lord have in mind for us? This church had a great legacy and we didn't want to see that perish. I am generally a very trusting person who believes the best in people until shown otherwise. So it was a real struggle for me when, several months in, some of the long-time members began not just being disrespectful to my husband, but being downright mean to him. There were hidden agendas, lies told to people outside the church, manipulation of people inside the church, secret meetings, all in an effort to oust him as pastor. The very people who had been some of his biggest allies in welcoming him to lead them had turned their back on him. And yet, these same people, professed lifelong Christians, would be sweet as pie to me on Sunday morning. It was a lot to handle. I knew God had led us there so it wasn't a matter of thinking we had to leave. But learning how to trust Him

and managing the hurt as we figured out how to stay. Replanting has a motto: PREACH, PRAY, LOVE, STAY. Bob's preaching was solid. Our prayer life was increasing. We were learning to love. And we were being challenged to stay.

In the beginning, in addition to trusting God with the painful situations regarding how my husband was being treated, I struggled with knowing what my part was in our Replant. Where did God want me to serve? There were plenty of roles to fill - janitor, childcare volunteer, church secretary, pianist, etc. - and I did my part filling them (except for the pianist). But what did God have specifically for me? What was my calling in our Replant? This required even more watching (trust) and waiting (patience) on my part. As we got to know our people more, and got a little more settled in our ministry there, a growing desire in my heart to encourage the young women in our church developed. So in between creating bulletins, planting flowers, and scheduling volunteers for kids ministry, not to mention fulfilling my roles as wife and mom, I began creating space to spend time with some of the young women in our church. Some were lifelong Christians. I enjoyed spending time with them and encouraging them in their marriage, work life, new motherhood, and their walk with

the Lord. It was life giving for me and I hope it was for them too.

One of the highlights for me was mentoring a gal named Amy. She was a single mom who lived with her boyfriend and his mother. She began coming to church on her own because she felt like something was missing in her life. On occasion her boyfriend would come with her as well. As I got to know her, she expressed the desire to learn more about Jesus and the stories in the Bible. So we began meeting regularly and reading the Bible together. She didn't have a Bible so I bought her a study Bible like the one I had. I'm not a Bible scholar at all, but God used this time to stretch me out of my comfort zone and to draw Amy closer to him. I didn't get the opportunity to see her come to Christ because she moved and we lost touch. But I'm thankful for the opportunity to plant some seeds and trust that God used someone else in her life to water them. In Replanting we don't always get to see the harvest, but we have ample opportunities to till the hard ground and plant some seeds.

One of the biggest challenges I faced was that I still had kids at home as well. Our calendar was full of school events, sporting events, music events, not to mention social events. We were also very consciously trying to build relationships in our city with people

who didn't know the Lord. So the balance between developing relationships with christian women in our church and non-christian women outside of our church, while being a present mom was very challenging.

As in any Replant, we had several couples and families who came alongside us, committing to join us in this work that the Lord had brought us to. They saw the vision for Replanting a dying church and told us they were with us. They rolled up their sleeves when we painted walls and refreshed the old building. They showed up for work days to plant flowers, dig up old shrubs and clean up the outside of the property. They built relationships with the long-time members. We had small groups during the week and these families were in our home, doing life with us - becoming our friends like family. In so many ways it felt like the things I had been watching and waiting for.

Unfortunately most of those families didn't actually stay as they said they would. One of the most difficult experiences was helping our youngest child navigate the pain and loss of those exact people, who she had grown to love, as they chose to leave. One specific family, she loved and spent a lot of time in their home. She took guitar lessons from the dad and spent time weekly with the mom, as a mothers-helper. She grew

close to them, and loved their kids as well. She loved them like family. It was devastating to her when they chose to leave our church and said they couldn't continue having her in their home.

I knew what she was feeling as I experienced the same feelings when people, not just fringe attenders, but friends who were members and leaders in the church, would leave. Sometimes the men would tell Bob, but oftentimes we were just ghosted by them. And of all the times people left only once did a wife call me and let me know. As much as it hurt, I appreciated that she did that because the feeling of rejection is real, especially when no words are spoken. One of the hardest things about this is that our town wasn't that big. We would see some of these people around town. And they would just act like everything was normal and no harm had been done. I had to lean on God a lot during that time in order to not grow bitter. I knew their leaving wasn't about me but it felt personal nonetheless.

Sometimes my kids had to take a backseat because there was a crisis, or other ministry situation that we needed to tend to - a marriage in crisis, pre-marital counseling, death of a church member's family. Although I struggled with guilt in these situations, it was important for our kids to see the Body of Christ in action. We

modeled that through generosity too - meals to families with new babies, meals to church members who had been in the hospital, groceries to church members who had more month than money. I trust that God used those very practical ways to show our kids what it looks like to love others.

One big blessing I received during our time in our Replant was my friendship with Laura Kate. Friendship within the church, when your husband is the pastor, can be a challenge. But Laura Kate pursued me for me. She didn't have any ulterior motives. She wasn't trying to get close to the pastor to know all the ins and outs of church life. She just wanted to be my friend. She was a great source of encouragement to me - especially when I was discouraged about how things were going at church or when we experienced struggles with our kids. She loved me, prayed for me, supported me in so many practical ways. She shared meals with me. She shared essential oils with me. She shared her life with me. God brought her into my life at a pivotal time and I'm so thankful for it.

Looking back on the 9+ years we spent in our Replant, I'm thankful for the experiences we had and for the things God taught me. I learned how to encourage other pastor wives. That was a preparation I was unknowingly receiving. I didn't know how

often I would have the opportunity to do that in the future. God used all those years, at each particular ministry location, but especially in our Replant to equip me to serve and love them well.

I've learned that when you give your life to Jesus, ministry never ends, it just changes. I continue watching and waiting, looking above.

7

Filled with His Goodness, Lost in His Love

By Erin Cofield

When I say, “I didn’t grow up dreaming of being a pastor’s wife,” I don’t mean that I didn’t think I would be married to a pastor. I didn’t think I would be married. Period. End of sentence. I also didn’t think I would have children or be involved in church. I grew up going to church because it was expected, not because I had any personal conviction about it. So being a church-attending Christian was so far away from what I expected out of my life that being a pastor’s wife was truly unfathomable to me. I had really, really good plans. I was planning to go to college, earn a degree in Journalism, become an interviewer (because I love hearing other people’s stories), and probably live in New York City in a cute apartment by myself. I wouldn’t have anything or anyone to care for; I would be entirely independent. They were great plans. But God had other plans.

My senior year of high school started with the shock of my life when I realized I was pregnant. I had been dating the same boy since 10th grade, and while I loved him, I couldn’t imagine marrying anyone. I had never seen a truly happy, functional marriage, and it just seemed like something that was fine for other people, but not for me. My mom had been married three times, and all had ended in divorce. My father was never in the picture, and I didn’t know him

at all. My grandparents, the one steady place in my life, didn't seem to like each other very much, even though they had been married for almost 40 years at that point. I was 17, lived with my grandparents, was a co-captain of the cheerleading squad, and co-editor of the yearbook. I was busy planning for college and my future. I had no time for a baby. Many people in my circle told me abortion or adoption were my only options. They said my boyfriend was a slacker, that he wouldn't be able to support a family, that I'd never go to college, and that I'd never have my dreams. But my boyfriend wasn't a typical teenage guy. Instead of running, Will asked me to marry him and to start this family. After a tense couple of months of pressure from all sides, I agreed... If nothing else, I thought it would at least quiet the noise around me.

Will and I married during winter break, a couple of days before Christmas. We had no honeymoon, no celebration. My grandfather walked me down the aisle, saying, "We can leave if you want. You don't have to do this. We can go." In every photo from that day, the adults look miserable, and the two 17-year-old kids getting married look absolutely terrified. We went home to our tiny, single-wide trailer in a trailer park, and as I unpacked, I had never felt so alone. My friends were receiving acceptance letters

and applying for scholarships. They were going on senior trips for Spring Break and picking out prom dresses. I was picking out maternity clothes, planning a nursery, and trying to learn how to be a mom. I had never changed a diaper, held a newborn, or experienced any type of birth - not even a puppy or kitten. I had no idea what was happening. My entire future was gone, and I had no idea how to handle all the changes happening so fast.

Alex arrived in late April - a stubborn, fiercely independent child even as a baby. Will and I settled into our new roles of mom and dad, and I tried to adjust. I watched my friends go to college or start careers, while I worked part-time and tried to attend a technical school. Will started a job that required him to work night shifts, and Alex and I tried our best to learn together. But I struggled so much. I was impatient and frustrated much of the time, and I yelled more than I care to admit.

I tried to go to church, like I was “supposed” to, but Will had no interest in it, and I felt too much judgment to be there faithfully. Will and I began to fight - a lot. We fought about how much he worked, how isolated I felt, and what we could and couldn’t afford. We fought about church and family (mine still couldn’t accept him). We

were an old, bickering, married couple on the brink of divorce, and we were only 19.

A year later, I was done. I never thought I would be married, and it felt like I had been right all along. I wasn't meant for this. I had no joy, no peace, and no love. I felt like I was someone else entirely, not the person I thought I would be. Will begged me to reconsider, to keep trying, but I made plans to move out and find a place of my own. Once again, God had other plans, and once again, they involved a baby.

When I realized I was pregnant again, I knew Will and I needed help. We were both tired of fighting, and we knew we couldn't raise two kids this way. I decided to give church a try again, hoping that maybe this time would be different. He agreed to go with me, and we started attending Riverbend Baptist Church. I joined the choir, and we went to Sunday School. There, we started noticing that people at Riverbend were different from what we thought Christians were like. They looked out for each other and helped their neighbors. They seemed to genuinely enjoy worship and serving the Lord. Church wasn't boring to them; it was invigorating. On December 3, 2000, I finally discovered the difference between them and me. They were saved and I wasn't. I went to the altar and asked the Lord to forgive me. I asked Him to make me

whole. I asked Him to heal my marriage. And I asked Him to help me accept that my life wasn't what I thought it would be. I rose from the altar changed...but my story was just beginning.

Will was saved a few months later, and we started to chase after the Lord. We were so hungry for Him. We both soaked up Bible studies and sermons. We had our second boy, and then had our last baby, a little girl, shortly after. We fell in love again. It felt like God had worked a miracle in both of us. My family accepted Will and admitted they had been wrong. He was a good provider and had a great job. I started making new friends, fellow Christian moms who supported and loved me. Finally, I felt like I could love who I was. I was a Christian, a wife, and a mom. It wasn't my plan, but it was good.

When Will told me he felt the Lord calling him to be a pastor, I wasn't surprised. But I also didn't think it would happen. He would need a better wife for that. I wasn't meant to be a pastor's wife. I had a terrible past with tons of mistakes, I was still struggling with anger, anxiety, and depression, and I certainly wasn't sweet enough. Truth be told, I'm more salty than sweet. I was pretty sure God would allow Will to become a pastor after I died, so he could remarry someone better suited to the

role. Besides, with three kids to support, we couldn't afford for him to quit his job and go to seminary. It just wasn't in the plans.

I think God must really love it when I plan something, because it gives Him a chance to really show off.

Will lost his job in 2008. He applied to over 100 corporate jobs and received an interview for only one. "Erin, I think God is showing me that I need to apply for a ministry position. I feel like it's disobedient not to," he explained. We had been leading youth ministry for a year or so, and it was clear Will was meant to be a youth pastor. "Ok, why don't you apply, and if a door opens, we'll walk through it." I felt confident that no doors would open. Will wasn't educated, had only one year of experience, and we needed a salary that could combine with mine to support a family. It wouldn't happen.

Three applications later, we had three job offers from three different churches. Not only had doors opened, we had a choice of doors one, two, or three.

We moved to Central Baptist in York, South Carolina, in November, 2008. They had a handful of youth, and we were excited to make a difference. We had big plans. Unfortunately, the church wasn't as ready for our big plans as we thought. It seemed like every single choice we made, we

encountered pushback. Every time we wanted to move forward, someone wanted to step backward. By 2016, the fractures, infighting, and chaos had driven away the senior pastor who had hired Will and threatened to split the church yet another time.

Will served as interim until 2017, when the church voted to hire him as the senior pastor. The next few years were marked by frustration and drama, as power brokers in the church wrestled for control of the church and its future. Once again, I struggled to find an identity. I wasn't the perfect pastor's wife, and several women in the church were quick to remind me of that, as if I wasn't already in agreement with them. I didn't cook enough, I wasn't at enough events, and worst of all...I wore jeans on Sunday morning. I was all wrong, all the time. I couldn't do anything right.

When Covid hit in 2020, it felt like a reprieve. The drama of recording worship services for a livestream was nothing compared to what we'd been going through for three years. We came back to in-person services after eight weeks, and almost immediately, the chaos started again.

In 2021, the church faced its greatest crisis. Will and I were informed that a deacon had sexually molested a young girl on church property. There was undeniable

video footage, which we reported to the police immediately. That was a Sunday night. The next day, the arrest was publicized, and social media went crazy with the story. We had an emergency meeting with our church and asked them to pray with us. Privately, we wondered if this was the end of Central Baptist. And I will admit in my innermost thoughts, I believed that God had abandoned us. There was no evidence of His hand on the church, and I couldn't imagine it going on after this latest scandal. Membership had already fallen, and I knew it would fall more. Will was determined to restart the church, but I started planning where we would need to move next.

The church spent 30 days in prayer. We shut down every program. We met on Sunday mornings for prayer, but cancelled everything else. We begged God to forgive us, and we repented of treating church like a social club. We asked God to redeem and restore Central. When we kicked back off a month later, we had lost many people. Only a remnant was left, but they were a faithful few. We started a Replant team and worked to recreate a church covenant that reflected unity and peace in our church. The church was revitalized, and with a new attitude, we began to reach our community.

Over the past five years, I have watched my husband grow as a leader and servant. But my own story has been just as powerful. I can see God's plans all over my life.

I never became a journalist, but I get to hear people's stories every day. I have seen families restored, broken marriages mended, prodigal children return, and addictions broken. I don't live in an apartment, independent of anyone. Instead, I live completely dependent on the Lord's goodness in my life and surrounded by an incredible family. We've added two daughters-in-law to the mix, whom I love like my own kids. I didn't stay single; I married a 17-year-old kid who is the best man I know, and we've been together almost 30 years. The Lord has blessed me. He has filled my life with His goodness. I was lost in sin; now I'm saved in His love. This wasn't my plan. It's so much better.

Acknowledgments

We'd like to thank our families and friends, who pray for us as we press on in this ministry.

Most of all we'd like to express our love and gratefulness to our heavenly Father who, no matter what our plans were, saw fit to bless us with the opportunity to equip and encourage women who have, are, and will experience the same kinds of joys and sorrows that we have through Replanting and Revitalizing the local church.

Authors



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 country. With a Master's degree in Christian Counseling from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and a Doctor of Ministry in Counseling from Liberty

The Replant Wife Team

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 has been married to her high school sweetheart, Will, for 29 years. They have three children, all in various stages of adulthood, a giant fluffy dog, and three cats. Erin has a B.A. in English with a Creative Writing focus from Regent University and is currently working toward her Masters in Christian Ministry from North Greenville University. Her passion is to see pastor's wives thrive in their calling and identity in Christ. She also loves Italian food, UGA football, and dessert. She can be reached at

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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



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

The Replant Wife Team



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.