

The Pastor's Spouse

This article is written by my wife Pam, not an official pastor, but very committed to the people. Sometimes the pastor may be a woman, and I cannot speak to that situation. There are some unique pressures that come with the role.

Relationship with God

Keep your relationship with God growing. You are responsible for your own growth. Do not expect your partner to do it for you. They have got enough unforgiving or apathetic Christians in their life without you joining them. Be an example to your partner without making them feeling guilty. Be your pastor's best prayer supporter!

Friendship

Be careful. It takes a long time to see into peoples' hearts and motives. Those who have proved to be real friends to me are those whom I did not seek after, but who wanted to bless me with no strings attached. I personally need close friendships but there is no need for the friendships to be obviously seen. Watch what you share. A real friend will not need to know your heartaches but will be happy just to be there for you. Let it be easily recognised whether you are responding to a parishioner as a counsellor, as a mentor or as a friend. Some people may want friendship with you as a lever to boost their prestige or to exercise power. It is ideal if your close friendships develop with the other people in leadership, but it may not happen that way. Loneliness is inevitable at times but can be lessened by different friends - one to take a bush walk with, one to have a laugh with, one to shop with. Never belong to a clique.

Acceptance

Accept that your partner is to be all things to all people and that more is expected of a pastor's spouse especially in behaviour. Acceptance brings peace. We will always feel inadequate but that is alright. Learn to 'roll with the punches'. Often we will need to be reminded of the Scriptural principle, 'we are not our own' 1 Corinthians :19-20.

Speech

Is what I say true, kind and necessary? Prejudging your comments by this assessment will keep you out of a lot of trouble. Do not pass on news that may have been intended just for you. You may naturally be an open person but others, especially hurt people will probably regard all affairs concerning them as strictly private.

When you are in pain emotionally, reach out for help (after all we tell our people that, don't we?). Choose a confidant with equal responsibilities to yourself or someone more senior.

Speaking to your husband is important. He needs to know if he unthinkingly gave a wrong impression or has acted inappropriately. Prayer and timing are important in this. Correct privately in a soft open kind of way and never after he has been in a spiritual battle, in high powered ministry or after he has been heavily involved with people. Your husband needs building up at these times.

Wives sometimes, especially in the earlier years of ministry have brilliant ideas of what their husband should or should not do. Often we do not know the full picture or even consider that he is a male and thinks differently from us. Let him be who he is, even while encouraging his spiritual growth. He has a whole congregation with expectations upon him. Stand with him quietly and encouragingly in his 'knocks' and times of strain. If he wants to resign through reaction, just love him and pray for him. It will probably pass. When he chooses to hold back information from you be glad of his protection from increased emotional strain. Always speak positively but not glowingly of your husband as other women might find the latter difficult.

Children

How precious children are and how they can help keep our lives from becoming unbalanced with too much work. At times they also show us we have got 'a long way to grow' as Christians! Train them from the beginning in the qualities you want them to have as adults. If there is a church war on - protect them from the emotion of it as much as possible and continue to speak lovingly even of those who oppose you. Let them know many times, 'Isn't it neat to be part of this church?' They will pick up the negative times without any mention. Never make your child your confidant but in their older teen years they can sensitively be 'let in' to some situations. You are training them to serve God. Build some great memories together by ignoring the work pressures and having fun.

Do not let demanding people take away the times you had planned with your children. You will always be in relationship with your kids but not with the other people. At the same time children need to learn that their own wants must at times yield to another's need.

Commitment

Ask God to give you insight into your priorities. You cannot do everything even though you may want to. If you get burnt out, you will be able to do nothing for a while. Agree together with your husband what is right for you to be involved in. It may not always be in your area of strength but at least it will help you become 'well rounded' in various skills. Learn commitment where you are. God will bring change at the right time. Serve your people as if you will be there forever and learn the lessons from God when He first teaches them. Tests are not meant to be easy. 'Consider it pure joy my brothers when you face trials of many kinds' James 1:2.

Romance

Only you and your husband will care about keeping this alive, so work at being friends and lovers not just prayer or pastoring partners. Learn how to agree together, not always

approaching situations from opposing perspectives. Every marriage is different and you work at making yours the one you want to grow old in. Have romantic dinners, day off traditions, favourite holiday places. Stop talking about church matters and have fun. Give him smiles and words of blessing especially before and after times of strain. You have got to keep your spirits in tune. Be there for one another.

Church house

Having lived in a church house and later in my own home during our years of pastoring I would have to say the latter is much more satisfying though more time consuming and expensive. If you are shown through a church house at the time of the initial interview, ask God for great wisdom and grace. Be grateful (these people have given sacrificially to buy this house for you) but be gently honest. If you see a need for something to be done, ask for it and get it written down. It is unlikely to get done once you are in the house unless you have an especially good church house committee.

It's likely nowadays that you buy your own home even though the church maybe provided you with one. If a greater mortgage is required than the pastoral family can afford and the family wants to use their home as ministry the church may help to offset the expense, but do not get too indebted to them. It is unhelpful in the long run. Work this out carefully.

If the church does not have an office of its own, try to establish it as soon as possible because it can quickly become a strain sharing your house with the church even though initially you are willing.

What wives want of their husbands if the husband is the lead pastor

Let her know she is your best friend, that she really matters more to you than all those church friends and followers.

Do not ignore the children when you are hurting or take out your pain on them. They can offer you a change of focus and at times a word of wisdom.

Let your spouse into your feelings. Do not isolate yourself when you hurt, because then she hurts. Let her know most of what is going on even if it is just generally. She wants to be part of your life without carrying the responsibility. Listen to her insight. If it is not a time for advice, tell her gently and she can pray. God's nudges are better than yours!

Give your wife reason to look up to you by being kind, showing integrity and having a disciplined growing walk with God.

Many couples nowadays decide for the wife to work at a paid job. Financially it's usually necessary. People don't have the expectations of the spouse's involvement as they once did, but they do still hope to be accepted and loved by them both.