

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

THE PASTOR AND HIS WIFE:  
FORTIFYING MARRIAGE AGAINST THE DEMANDS OF MINISTRY

SUBMITTED TO PROFESSOR JOHN SCHUETZE  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to contribute to practical theology. Marriage and the public ministry are two gifts of God that are uniquely intertwined as a pastor serves his church and his family. God intends both of these to be blessings to those he delights to give them. Every good and perfect gift still is from above. The goal is to look at this unique balancing act: offering reminders about how God has created man and woman psychologically different, identifying common stressors that have affected couples in the ministry, and rejoicing in the blessings God gives in a marriage affected by ministry. His name be honored and glorified!

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## INTRODUCTION

You are at the end of a procession that seems to take forever. Each of your friends goes first, coupled with a friend of the groom. The butterflies in your stomach have increased their fluttering as you hold on to your father at the end of the line. With the last of the bridal party in place, the time has come to walk down the aisle. The congregation stands, and each step seems slower than rehearsed. There's your husband-to-be waiting to take your arm. Your father gives him a firm handshake and gives you away. Then the two of you come before the Lord's altar vowing to love and care for one another come what may. Fast-forward to the present, and you are still together trying to faithfully carry out those same vows with God's help.

You have reached the end of an eight-year journey (maybe longer if you include high school and grade school). You have diligently searched the Scriptures and learned to mine for treasures of God's Word. You have learned to carry a humble zeal in your heart in service to the Lord. You care for people and eagerly wait to share the gospel with them. Maybe, you have let your imagination run wild and foolishly thought: "I'm the pastor that's going to save the world." Still, here you are sitting and waiting. Your name is called. You stand and walk up the gymnasium steps. You walk to the seminary president, give a handshake with one hand as you take the diploma with the other, and return his smile with one of your own (The small choreography you practiced payed off.). You go back and sit down. In a couple months, you will go to your first congregation and be ordained into the ministry. You will vow to preach and teach God's Word correctly and shepherd the flock you have been given faithfully. Fast-forward to the present, and you are still trying to faithfully carry out this vow with God's help.

On paper, these two vocations would seem to function better if they were maintained separately. However, both the vocation of marriage and the vocation of ministry are gifts of God. Both gifts are designed to emulate the relationship of Christ and his Church. Both gifts are meant to be blessings from God and not burdens. Perhaps, certain verses are already flooding your mind. Some are short and sweet. “Whoever desires to be an overseer desires a noble task” (1 Tim 3:1 NIV11). “A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies” (Prov 31:10). Some admonitions are more detailed.

“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet 5:2-3).

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Eph 5:21-22, 25-27).

As you read the passages listed above (particularly the last two), perhaps you begin to feel inadequate or ill-equipped in your roles both as a husband or wife and as pastor or pastor’s wife. The struggle is real as you try to maintain some sort of private life as spouses, while living in the fish bowl of public life on display for the congregation. Where does one vocation end and the other begin? How is there time for both without short-changing or even disliking one or the other?

Marriage is one of God’s gifts to society. God established marriage as the building block for communities. Within that marriage union, it is God’s will that husband and wife love one another for a lifetime. This means expressing deep concern for the other spouse and leading

husband and wife to act in the best interest of the other. Even when the feelings of love are lacking, husband and wife are committed to love each other.<sup>1</sup>

Pastors and their ministry are God's gift to his Church. The pastor is called to be the under-shepherd to a specific group of believers. He is willing and able to serve, has integrity and personality, and must be faithful.<sup>2</sup> In some cases, the pastor will have a wife and maybe even children before his first call. While both the spouses may understand the importance and gravity of the call in ministry, there will be a balancing act between tending to the family of believers and the strengthening of the personal family.

Practically carrying out these functions day-to-day proves challenging for both spouses, because both commitment and understanding (or understanding of the commitments) is required. There can be sadness, loneliness, anger, and animosity just as there can be joy, happiness, love, and contentment at any given time as both spouses struggle to walk forward in their unique vocations.

The purpose of this paper is not to sour its audience on the vocation of the pastoral ministry or the vocation of marriage. God still intends both of these to be blessings to those he delights to give them. Every good and perfect gift still is from above (James 1:17). The goal is to look at this unique balancing act. How can the marriage of a pastor and his wife be fortified and balance the demands of ministry?

First, this paper offers important reminders about how God has created man and woman psychologically different and how this in turn should shape how a husband and wife care for their spouse. Second, while each ministry and marriage setting is unique to each couple, there are

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<sup>1</sup> John Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls: The Art of Pastoral Theology* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2017), 215.

<sup>2</sup> Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 36-40.

common struggles that affect everyone. Through survey data of WELS pastors and their wives, this paper looks at some of those common areas and offers suggestions for coping based on the advice offered by those same couples. Third, this paper will rejoice in the blessings God gives in a marriage affected by ministry provided in the survey results. In spite of difficulties and challenges, God deigns to give abundantly so that his name is honored and glorified.

## CHAPTER 1:

### THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

This may not shock the average person. However, there are differences between male and female. God designed each gender differently. They are not unisex beings but are different biologically and psychologically. Aside from gender, each person also possesses their own personality filled with strengths and weaknesses.<sup>3</sup> While the two physically become one flesh in the sanctity of marriage, it is important to recognize the differences that exist in how God has designed male and female to compliment one another and give God thanks for his workmanship and wisdom. It is realized that one could spend an entire thesis on these differences. However, the idea is to provide a general overview of key areas.

#### **The Brain**

The control center of the human body continues to puzzle and amaze the scientific community. It has led to some interesting theories and experiments over the years. While no woman is from Venus and no man is from Mars, the Lord has packed this organ with some recognized differences between the sexes.

*Forming & Formatting* – As the human brain develops in utero, it is formed primarily with the aid of sex steroids and additives: progesterone and estrogen in females; androgens and testosterone in males. Males receive their biggest testosterone hit mid-gestation not only

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<sup>3</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2016), 202.

developing body parts but also brain proportions.<sup>4</sup> Sex-based differences in brain structure and physiology reflect an alchemy of chromosomes, hormones, and their receptors within each cell.<sup>5</sup> Even in the womb, God has knit each individual differently and carefully.<sup>6</sup>

*Connectivity and Processing* – Males use more gray matter than females. These gray splotches throughout the brain are centers for gathering information and generally lead to internationalized, focused action.<sup>7</sup> Females use more white matter in the brain or more of their networking grid which connects one processing center to another.<sup>8</sup> This results in women being good multi-taskers, while men are better at task-focused projects.<sup>9</sup> Men tend to track objects better visually, while women perform better with verbal skills and comprehension.<sup>10</sup>

*Structure* – While male brains are bigger, female brains have more natural blood flow allowing them a higher level of concentration.<sup>11</sup> Females also have more neural connections in their hippocampus (the memory center). This allows them to connect emotions and other sensory activity to events and circumstances and remember them clearly. Male memory reflection tends

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Goldman, “*Two Minds: The Cognitive Differences between Men and Women*,” Stanford Medicine Spring 2017: <https://stanmed.stanford.edu/2017spring/how-mens-and-womens-brains-are-different.html>

<sup>5</sup> Goldman, “*Two Brains*”, <https://stanmed.stanford.edu/2017spring/how-mens-and-womens-brains-are-different.html>

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 139:13

<sup>7</sup> Gregory Jantz, “*Brain Differences Between Genders*” Psychology Today February 27, 2014: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hope-relationships/201402/brain-differences-between-genders>

<sup>8</sup> Jantz, “*Brain Differences*”, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hope-relationships/201402/brain-differences-between-genders>

<sup>9</sup> Goldman, “*Two Brains*”, <https://stanmed.stanford.edu/2017spring/how-mens-and-womens-brains-are-different.html>

<sup>10</sup> Goldman, “*Two Brains*”, <https://stanmed.stanford.edu/2017spring/how-mens-and-womens-brains-are-different.html>

<sup>11</sup> Jantz, “*Brain Differences*”, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hope-relationships/201402/brain-differences-between-genders>

to be brief and less intense.<sup>12</sup> Also, the male possesses less connectivity between memory and verbal skills making it difficult to express himself.<sup>13</sup>

It is important to realize that these differences by God's design identify males and females. The gender of a brain is determined in the womb.<sup>14</sup> Through this determination, the Lord makes each of the sexes unique to themselves and compliments to each other in the sanctity of marriage.

### Emotions

Emotions govern how a person perceives and feels in this world around them. Women are usually more emotion based and feel things more readily from a subjective nature.<sup>15</sup> As stated earlier, most female memories are sensory based and detailed. Men are more reason based, fact-oriented and objective. This makes them usually less sensitive.<sup>16</sup> A classic illustration of this is in the retelling of a baby's birth. Most men are satisfied that the birth occurred. Most women want to know gender, length, weight, name, etc.

Women tend to identify easily with others, while men are emotionally detached.<sup>17</sup>

Women are relationship oriented and define themselves through the upkeep of those

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<sup>12</sup> Goldman, "Two Brains", <https://stanmed.stanford.edu/2017spring/how-mens-and-womens-brains-are-different.html>

<sup>13</sup> Jantz, "Brain Differences", <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hope-relationships/201402/brain-differences-between-genders>

<sup>14</sup> Goldman, "Two Brains", <https://stanmed.stanford.edu/2017spring/how-mens-and-womens-brains-are-different.html>

<sup>15</sup> Dave Earley, *14 Secrets to a Better Marriage: Powerful Principles from the Bible* (Uhrichville, OH: Barbour Publishing, Inc., 2011), 56.

<sup>16</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 57.

<sup>17</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 57.

relationships.<sup>18</sup> Personal expression of their feelings in this network of relationships is important. This is why it is important for a husband to listen to his wife...and only listen. It is necessary for her to talk about her day, because it provides her with not only a natural coping mechanism but also a means of personal understanding. She is not necessarily looking for a solution to any particular problem.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand, men will traditionally withdraw or bottle emotions. This does not mean they avoid them, but will revisit them later, particularly if there is a problem associated with those emotions.<sup>20</sup> As mentioned earlier, connections between an emotional encounter and expression of those emotions in a male's brain are distant ones. That's why they tend to look for distractions and escape, whether it's down in a mancave, reading, watching television, whittling, etc.

If something does require immediate attention and cannot be put off, the male can become so focused on finding the solution to the one immediate problem that he loses sight of what may be happening around him.<sup>21</sup> He forgets about responsibilities or even other problems in his quest for an answer.

Since the female world is built on her network of relationships, the wife may easily perceive from her husband that something is wrong. Since she deals with emotions and their related issues by talking them through, she may offer advice.<sup>22</sup> However, this generally may have a more negative effect than the positive one she intended. Instead of being relationship oriented

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<sup>18</sup> Gray, *Men Mars*, 18-19.

<sup>19</sup> Gray, *Men Mars*, 21-22.

<sup>20</sup> Gray, *Men Mars*, 31-33.

<sup>21</sup> Gray, *Men Mars*, 31.

<sup>22</sup> Gray, *Men. Mars*, 13.

as she is, the husband is very success and goal oriented. Instrumental to that success is his role in it. The more he can plan and participate in the solution, the more satisfied he will be.<sup>23</sup>

These are the husband-wife stereotypes that are rich fodder for comedians. While their idiosyncrasies may provide some witty remarks and observations, the awareness of these differences is no laughing matter. However, in observation we are limited to generalities. It is likely that each husband and wife pair will not fall in line with these stereotypes.<sup>24</sup> Each is a mix of emotions and tendencies unique to their person. The gift of individuality is not lost on the Creator of all things just as the gift of union in marriage is not happenstance.

### **Language and Communication**

Most, if not all, books for a successful marriage have a chapter (or more) devoted to the unique languages of men and women and how to communicate effectively through the language of the other spouse. They can be divided in many different ways. There can be two, five, eight, or ten depending on the book. Gary Chapman's *The 5 Love Languages* continues to be one of the most widely used. This paper will offer a brief overview of each of the five. The intended purpose is to recognize how each spouse communicates differently and how that must be understood by the other.

*Words of Affirmation* – Nothing good should go unsaid. A spouse can be uplifted and driven by the other's compliments and encouragements. These are not the result of a request that is realized only after endless nagging. These words are kind, compassionate, full of empathy and understanding. They bring value to the spouse whether he or she is content or struggling. They

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<sup>23</sup> Gray, *Men. Mars*, 16-17.

<sup>24</sup> Early, *14 Secrets*, 58.

give validity to emotions and provide them with worth and confidence. It shows the other spouse trusts and cares for them, even though they may not wish to give details. These words can be verbally expressed or written. It doesn't have to be poetry worthy of a Hallmark card. It simply needs to be genuine.<sup>25</sup>

*Quality Time* – The giving of some undivided attention between spouses is refreshing. This is not sitting in front of an electronic device, but engaging with one another. This can be talking in conversation or the pursuit of a common activity. The prime enjoyment does not come in the act itself. The emphasis is on why you are doing it and with whom you are doing it. Sometimes being an active listener can accomplish more than engaging in a dialogue. A spouse can take note of emotions and body language of the other, while maintaining eye contact and not interrupting. The fact that he or she is there and engaged speaks volumes of respect and love.<sup>26</sup>

*Receiving Gifts* – Visual symbols or expressions of love may be more important to some than others. This does not mean one should break the bank every time or wait only for those yearly special occasions. Small tokens of affection can be even more meaningful than larger ones. It's not all roses and chocolates either. This language requires thought, observation, maybe even help from relatives. It may also be that a spouse simply would like the gift of presence more often from his or her mate. Simply being close by in good times and times of crisis can help the other share their joy, sadness, or concern. Receiving of gifts does not have a set time table or monetary budget, but their value to a spouse cannot be underestimated.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Gary Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages: The Secret to Love That Lasts* (Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2015), 37-53.

<sup>26</sup> Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages*, 55-72.

<sup>27</sup> Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages*, 75-89.

*Acts of Service* – Acts of service are those things that a spouse knows their partner would want them to do. It could be washing dishes, changing diapers, keeping the car working, paying the bills on time, or walking the dog. These everyday tasks can communicate love to the other spouse. However, these take time, energy, and planning like anything else. They also must be done with a willing spirit and not forced. Acts of service might also require a spouse to find out from their mate what is especially important to them. He or she could also find that what is important to their spouse might require the breaking of traditional male and female stereotypes. However, stereotypes mean nothing when it means meeting the needs of a spouse. Actions speak louder than words.<sup>28</sup>

*Physical Touch* – The sexual bond God established between husband and wife is a powerful one, and it may seem that one spouse seems to hunger for it more often than the other. However, sex is not always the required answer if a spouse communicates through this love language. Hand holding, kissing, and embracing could be just as effective. Ultimately, spouses with this language yearn to be loved through this primary emotional lifeline.<sup>29</sup>

Whatever the language dynamic, it must be understood that the needs of a husband and wife must be clearly communicated. Both spouses must make an effort to understand the other and serve them effectively as God desires them to do.

## **Roles**

The roles of men and women might be the most recognizable of differences for Christian spouses, because of their biblical source. If they went to premarital counseling, maybe one week

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<sup>28</sup> Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages*, 91-104.

<sup>29</sup> Chapman, *The 5 Love Languages*, 107-117.

or two was devoted to studying these differences. These have nothing to do with our status before God in Christ, but were assigned by him for proper order and function of the marriage and family unit. Here is one way they may have been listed for discussion:<sup>30</sup>

| <b>Husband</b>   | <b>Wife</b>  |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lead (Ephesians 5:23)</li> <li>2. Love (Ephesians 5:25, 33)</li> <li>3. Train Your Children (Ephesians 6:4)</li> <li>4. Provide for Your Family (1 Timothy 5:8)</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Support his leadership (Ephesians 5:22; 1 Peter 3:1-6)</li> <li>2. Respect (Ephesians 5:33)</li> <li>3. Love your family (Titus 2:4)</li> <li>4. Prioritize your family (Titus 2:5)</li> </ol> |

Each of the points listed could take pages to explain and apply. This paper will briefly focus on three: leadership, love, and respect. Notice how these three aspects of marriage are intricately connected.

*Leadership* – God has given the task of leadership to the husband. This leadership is comprised of unselfish decision making, actively taking an interest in spouse and family, protecting and providing for spouse and family, and giving sound and mature spiritual counsel and promoting spiritual growth for the “little church” of which he is the head.<sup>31</sup> Put another way: No wife dreams of marrying a spiritual wimp, selfish slob, couch potato, or spineless nice guy.<sup>32</sup> Sometimes, there is nothing more humiliating (or more necessary) than for a wife to say to her husband: “Lead!”

Leadership is not a position of rank but responsibility.<sup>33</sup> Leaders have plans and follow a clear direction. Leaders give guidance based on the convictions they have and the faith they

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<sup>30</sup> The following list is from Dave Earley’s *14 Secrets to a Better Marriage*, page 61.

<sup>31</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 90-91.

<sup>32</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 80.

<sup>33</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 91.

display.<sup>34</sup> Through a husband's actions as head of household, spouse and family can feel loved and cared for.

*Love* – Love for each other's spouse is meant to be unconditional. This means that a husband is to love his wife, even though at that moment she may not respect him, and the wife should love her husband, even though at that moment he is rather cold and distant.<sup>35</sup> The command to love is not proportional either, just like marriage is not proportional. Fifty-fifty, sixty-forty, and eighty-twenty do not count. Each spouse is to give all they have, even when their partner is lacking.<sup>36</sup>

Husbands love unconditionally through their effective leadership. Through his unselfish decisions, a husband shows he is attentive to the needs of his wife and family. Sacrificing time for his spouse to give her attention, adoration, and assurance shows he deeply cares for his wife not only physically but spiritually and emotionally.<sup>37</sup> Providing for his spouse provides stability, while protecting her bodily as well as her good character gives his spouse comfort and confidence in her husband's faithfulness.

A husband leads through his godliness. He makes it a priority that he and his wife are spiritually fed.<sup>38</sup> There are a number of ways this can be accomplished, whether through devotions, prayer time together, or encouraging faithfulness in worship and Bible studies. Perhaps, the danger lies in assuming this is happening or will continue to happen without a

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<sup>34</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 90-91.

<sup>35</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 70-71.

<sup>36</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 70.

<sup>37</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 92.

<sup>38</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 92.

husband's example. What encouragement to a spouse and family if the husband takes his spiritual role seriously! Being present for times of spiritual growth speak volumes.

*Respect* – Wives show love to their husbands through the respect they give. This respect is not earned, but is his because of his leadership role given by God.<sup>39</sup> Like the love between spouses, this respect is supposed to be unconditional.<sup>40</sup> This is very difficult to do, particularly if the wife sees her husband failing in his leadership or love toward her. Her husband's decisions can be quick and ill-informed, or he may not seek God's counsel for help and direction.<sup>41</sup> This does not mean the wife is to be a doormat to an overbearing husband. Nor does it mean she must endure mental, physical, or emotional abuse at the hand and mouth of her husband.

Most men desire above anything else to be respected, trusted, and admired by those close to them. The reverse is also true: Nothing de-motivates men faster than the loss of respect and admiration.<sup>42</sup> If given the choice, most men were shown to prefer to be in a relationship where they are respected instead of deeply loved rather than the opposite.<sup>43</sup> He wants opportunity after opportunity to be a hero.<sup>44</sup> Instead of tearing her husband down, or trying to "fix" him to get with the program, an understanding wife can do more through thoughtful and loving encouragement. Remember, he needs to see his Savior in his marriage just as much as she does.

Leadership, love, and respect are not the only things that make up a marriage. However, through a brief analysis, it can be seen how integrated and intentional each of these aspects are.

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<sup>39</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 75.

<sup>40</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 70.

<sup>41</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 75-76.

<sup>42</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 73-74.

<sup>43</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 73-74.

<sup>44</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 80-81.

God was not foolish in commanding each of these things in the marital union. God commands leadership, love, respect, and other qualities of a marriage, because he knows what each spouse needs in order for that relationship to be healthy and stable.<sup>45</sup>

### **In Christ**

As this chapter closes, it is paramount to remember who the husband and wife are in Christ. The heavy weight of miscommunication and missed opportunities burdens a conscience. No spouse has carried out his or her duties perfectly. Perhaps, evil seems to out-pace the good of the marriage relationship. Callous words and actions are more memorable and any loving acts become so much smaller and insignificant. Self-centered sin has made a mess of what should be the most loving and lasting of earthly relationships.

God knows these difficulties and challenges and has seen the many failures of husband and wife. As spouses crumble under his righteous commands, he lovingly rescues and uplifts them with the comfort of his gospel. “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph 4:32). In Christ, God forgives the unthoughtful husband. In Christ, God forgives the nagging wife. In Christ, both are washed clean wearing robes of righteousness that are as white as snow. In Christ, husband and wife can seek to honor, love, and forgive each other as reflections of their Savior serving one another faithfully.

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<sup>45</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 69-70.

## CHAPTER 2:

### FORTIFYING MARRIAGE AGAINST THE DEMANDS OF MINISTRY

The pastoral ministry is just as much a unique calling as that of marriage, and in some ways, strikingly similar. While it is pictured the same way as the relationship between Christ and his Church, the calling brings with it its own responsibilities, difficulties, and joys. A candidate for ministry will display the desire, integrity, ability to serve, personality, and faithfulness required for the noble task.<sup>46</sup> When he receives his call as an under-shepherd to Christ, he will look to humbly maintain and grow in these qualities, as well as, maintain his own spiritual livelihood.

The pastor will look to lead the flock he has been given. He will lead his congregation as a model of the Good Shepherd: humbly serving them.<sup>47</sup> He does not lack the confidence to lead, but will gently and firmly give direction and sound spiritual guidance.<sup>48</sup> The called servant will look to care for his flock giving them a rich supply of God's Word. With this powerful tool he will feed and keep watch over them.<sup>49</sup>

The pastor will also train his flock, equipping his people not only for the work of the ministry but also to glorify God in their many vocations in life, including those he shares in common with them.<sup>50</sup> The pastor will also desire to reach those lost souls not of his sheep pen.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 27.

<sup>48</sup> Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 27.

<sup>49</sup> Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 30.

<sup>50</sup> Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 32.

<sup>51</sup> Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 30-31.

Mindful of the Great Commission, he will want to bring others into the loving arms of the Savior.

Ministry and marriage are both good and noble in the sight of God. Nowhere in Scripture does he place one over the other, nor does the Lord say to deprive one calling because of the other. Blessings they are intended to be, and blessings both will remain until eternity, though both require faithfulness and diligent work.

So, the pastor (and his wife and family) become part of a balancing act. The pastor especially is caught in the middle of a great pendulum swing: Being faithful to his ministry vs. being faithful to his household. How can he avoid hurting one without feeling he disenfranchises the other? How can his spouse, while realizing her husband must faithfully serve in ministry, not feel alone or embittered because of it?

### **The Surveys**

In mid-October 2018, 81 pastors and their wives were randomly selected and mailed surveys. The questions pertained to the effects of the ministry on their marriage: the challenges they face, how they cope, how they support each other, etc. The questions have been included as appendices to this thesis. The voluntary participants were asked to be honest and forthright with their answers, and to not complete their survey with the other spouse present.

It was hoped that common struggles in ministry would emerge from the data as well as strategies to fortify and strengthen the marriage. The presentation of this data serves to aid ministry couples sharing those same struggles and provide them with useful tools and encouragement.

The surveys have 20 questions in common. In this thesis, some questions will be presented by themselves followed by anonymous feedback of both pastors and wives. Some will be given as background information or included as appropriate. The comments selected in good taste will highlight common themes as well as attempt to present the full spectrum of responses. Responses will be presented in tables with a pastor's feedback on the left and the corresponding feedback of his wife on the right. Brief comments and observations will follow.

### **Background**

Of the 81 couples who were randomly selected, 31 returned completed surveys (38%). The 31 couples were generally evenly dispersed among years of marriage.

| <b>Years Married</b> | <b>Number of Couples</b> |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 0-10                 | 8 (27%)                  |
| 11-20                | 9 (30%)                  |
| 21-30                | 7 (23%)                  |
| 31-40                | 6 (20%)                  |
| 40+                  | 1 (3%)                   |

The majority of couples were married an average of three years before they entered full-time ministry. Six couples have been married for as long as they have served in full-time ministry. Most have children of varying ages. All serve in a variety of church settings: small, medium, large, rural, urban, mission, etc.

**Question: Approximately, how many hours do you (does your husband) work per week?**

| <b>Average Hours/Week</b> | <b>Pastor</b> | <b>Wife</b> |
|---------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| 40-49                     | 19%           | 16%         |
| 50-59                     | 52%           | 42%         |
| 60-69                     | 16%           | 23%         |
| 70-79                     | 3%            | 10%         |
| 80-89                     | 6%            | 0%          |

| <b>Average Hours/Week</b> | <b>Pastor</b> | <b>Wife</b> |
|---------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Not Quantified            | 3%            | 10%         |

Generally, pastor and wife were in the ballpark of each other's responses. Some offered qualifiers with their estimates such as season of the church year, number of weekly meetings, etc. A few had difficulties quantifying their hours. Two questions were asked in follow-up.

**Question: On average, how many nights are you (is your husband) home during the week?  
(for supper, children's bedtimes, etc.)**

| <b>Number of Nights</b> | <b>Pastor Percentage</b> | <b>Wife Percentage</b> |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 2                       | 3%                       | 3%                     |
| 3                       | 33%                      | 33%                    |
| 4                       | 30%                      | 27%                    |
| 5                       | 20%                      | 10%                    |
| 6                       | 17%                      | 27%                    |

With this particular question, there was a wide number of variables mentioned in the individual responses. Some variables include: season of the church year, being at home for supper each night before church meetings, nature of the call, size of congregation, and stage of the couple's life. There was some give and take between pastor and wife regarding the number of days, but no major discrepancies to report. It is amazing that the percentages are rather uniform with a couple exceptions.

**Question: Does the congregation designate/give or allow you (your husband) a day off during the week?**

| Pastor   | Wife   |
|--|--|
| “Yes, they allow it and even encourage it.”  | “Yes, he takes Monday off”   |
| “I attempt to have a day off. I’m certainly allowed one, but with my workload, I can’t always take one. I often joke – on my day off, I just work 8 hours instead of 12-16.” | “Allow is more accurate (passively, at that), but yes.”  |
| “I have set Friday as my day off. It doesn’t always work, but I “fight” for it rather honestly with my leaders. They understand the importance.”                             | “Yes – he has Fridays off, and aside from funerals or other unusual circumstances, he takes that time off. He learned early on that this is vital.”  |
| “No. (This just came up at a ministry review, and will be put into place.)”  | “Current congregation currently does not give him a specific day off, although they are planning to fix that. (Previous congregation gave him Mondays off.)”   |
| “I believe the congregation would give me that, but I’ve chosen not to. However, if I need to do something on a given day, they would be OK with that.”                      | “He usually doesn’t take a regular day off but the congregation wouldn’t mind if he did. He does use the flexibility of his schedule to run errands, personal appointments etc. Last Friday we both took off and went hiking.” |

All responses fall into these general guidelines. Pastors were also asked if they felt they could ask for a day off if one was not already designated. Most felt they could go to their church council confidently if they needed to. The paper will discuss this more under the topic of ministry stressors.

Ultimately, these first inquiries culminate in the following:

**Question: Do you communicate with your wife about your/Does your husband communicate with you about his work schedule? If so, how often?**

| Pastor   | Wife   |
|--|--|
| “Yes, but not as well & not often enough. We share our calendars on Google.” | “Yes, we share a complex Google calendar and usually inform each other verbally of significant changes (i.e. funerals) within 24 hours or so.” |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| “We try to meet Sunday nights to discuss the week ahead – kid pick up and drop offs, supper plans. When we do week goes smooth. When we do not it is chaotic and like flying a plane blind.” | “We have a shared calendar on iPhone but aren’t always great about using it. For a while, we discussed schedules, menus, etc on Sunday nights over a drink. We need to do that again.” |
| “Yes, every day I try to indicate if I will be home or not.”   | “If it interferes with our family time. He does not always tell me his daily schedule that coincides with the kids’ school schedule.”  |
| “Communication happens a few days or a week ahead of time (e.g. if I’m teaching a BIC for a few weeks).”   | “Not an issue. We’ve tried to coordinate with google calendars, but I prefer written calendars.”   |
| “Kitchen whiteboard lays out most schedule affecting home.”  | “Yes, daily.”  |

There was only one couple who admitted to not communicating their schedule effectively. Those that elaborated in their answers confessed that no system is perfect. Also, once couples were used to the weekly schedule, only semi-regular events and appointments went on the calendar like conferences, BIC courses, or seasonal Bible studies. As shown, there are many ways to keep a calendar, and that means everyone can stay on the same page with the exception of the rare emergency.

This group of questions indicate that those surveyed have a healthy understanding of the commitment to ministry. It’s not a 9-5 40 hours/week job. Many professions outside the ministry require such commitment. However, there is a certain amount of flexibility that not all professions can provide.<sup>52</sup> This does not mean that they enjoy the strain that can come with it. However, this awareness serves them well. They can adjust to the changing demands of ministry as needed. Being informed is a necessity.

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<sup>52</sup> Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 47.

## Ministry Stressors

**Question: List and describe any ministry stressors that you feel affect your marriage?**

| Pastor   | Wife   |
|--|--|
| “The biggest problem is the amount of work I have some weeks. It can consume my time and energy making me less helpful at home. Dealing with problems in marriages can make me worried about marriage.”  | “Busyness: of course, this puts stress on our marriage, when I feel like I’m single-parenting most days. It’s hard on me to remain upbeat and positive.”   |
| “There are some “high maintenance” people in our church who do demand much of my time. Also, we have some people who strongly have their opinions which they want heard.”  | “He shares accounts of church members hurting his feelings or causing divisions in the church. I have trouble being around these members afterwards.”  |
| “I don’t talk to my wife about most “church stuff” because if I do, she gets emotionally involved. The problem is that doesn’t leave me with much to talk about, which she wishes I would do more.”  | “The inability to talk about work. He has to bottle everything up & that has been unhealthy for him. I forced him to do CrossTrain & it has been important for him. He can’t leave work at the door because his whole family is involved & connected. I mean how many people go to “work” with their spouses AND watch them lead.” |
| “At times some of the financial stability issues make things uneasy as a result of pay or budgetary shortfalls Sometimes when there are tense things happening at church, they can and do affect our interactions. I try to keep work at work but it doesn’t always happen.” | “The only real stressor I can think of is when he has so many things going on in a week that we don’t have a chance to connect or talk.”   |

There were many responses to this question. Some were in great detail and communicated many personal frustrations. While some stressors were unique to their specific ministry setting, all responses shared one or more of the following themes: congregation, budget, family time, and pastors taking it personally.

*Congregation* – Call them sharks, crocodiles, or high maintenance, there are those church members who can find fault with everything a pastor or pastor’s wife does. The pastor and his wife realize that these people are still part of the Savior’s precious fold, but they can make ministry exceedingly difficult intentionally or unintentionally. Some situations turn volatile

quickly, while some simmer over time. The pastor and his wife feel hurt, especially if the venom comes from close friends or even colleagues in the ministry. Ministry work can become greatly impaired.

Here are two things to keep in mind. First, keep the line of communication open with your spouse. Surveyed pastors noted that they try to protect their wives from backlash, and while there is confidentiality to consider, pastors noted that it was not good to keep it all bottled up. On the other side, wives noticed a change in behavior or temperament, were willing to comfort and console, but felt brushed aside and shut out. One wife wrote: “If he at least told me that it wasn’t anything I did, instead of saying nothing, that made things a little better.” As was brought up earlier, women thrive on maintaining relationships.<sup>53</sup> So, when she sees her 2<sup>nd</sup> most important relationship is suffering, she is going to get concerned.

Second, especially in volatile situations, remember the synodical benefits of being a pastor. The husband can call on brothers in the ministry for help, especially the circuit pastor, if problems persist. They can give good counsel and work with you to restore harmony if possible. The synod has given the pastor his public credentials and is more than willing to help in difficult ministry situations.<sup>54</sup>

Other congregational difficulties listed in the survey included what some pastors term “ecclesiastical politics”. These may not be volatile situations. However, they can become tense, heated arguments. Other couples indicated a congregation’s lack of motivation to serve or participate in evangelism. Again, realize these are still members in need of the gospel. While it is difficult to think about in the heat of the moment, it is the gospel that motivates and stirs hearts.

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<sup>53</sup> Gray, *Men from Mars*, 17-18.

<sup>54</sup> Armin Schuetze & Irwin Habeck, *The Shepherd Under Christ: A Textbook for Pastoral Theology* (Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1974, third printing 2003), 362-363.

Gently admonish and administer where possible, and leave the work of motivating hearts to the Holy Spirit.

*Budgeting* – It gets tough when the church budget has an effect on your budget. It's hard enough trying to request and allocate money for ministry purposes, and then remembering you have your own bills, growing children, and other expenses at home. Couples surveyed wished they had better control of their finances from the start. Even if they were at one time encouraged to monitor their finances through seminary or parents or other ministry couples, the newness and day-to-day activities of church life can push this far into the background. This is not just the problem of newlyweds, even though those early money issues could be solved with time and experience.<sup>55</sup> Long-term couples also face financial challenges, particularly as circumstances change: children's education, retirement planning, elderly parents, etc.<sup>56</sup>

There are many books and plans out there. Dave Ramsey's *Financial Peace University* was listed among those surveyed. There are financial software options such as *Quicken* or *Mint*. It can be as simple as an Excel spreadsheet. If spouses' financial opinions differ concerning which areas are most important to keep them financially happy, talk it over before committing to a plan. It will help diffuse tensions later if/when problems arise.<sup>57</sup> Keep your financial house in order. It's one less headache.

*Family Time* – This may be the one stressor that is the least surprising. The pendulum swing between pastor and husband/father is constant. Some respondents were very emotional in their writing concerning this difficulty. Wives feel like single parents, supper times are

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<sup>55</sup> John Gottam and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work: A Practical Guide from the Country's Foremost Relationship Expert* (New York, NY: Harmony Books, 2015), 207.

<sup>56</sup> Gottam, *Seven Principles*, 207.

<sup>57</sup> Gottam, *Seven Principles*, 212.

interrupted or delayed, and last-minute appointments turn into long counseling sessions. Pastors feel the weight and the burden on their side too and know the problems it can cause at home. Earlier in this paper, the observation was made that those surveyed had a healthy understanding of ministry commitments, while at the same time, do not have to endure the strain placed on their family.

A pastor is always on call ready to assume his duties and responsibilities. He lets the congregation know they can contact him for help any time. However, that does not mean his response must always be immediate – unless it is an emergency. The pastor will have to use discernment in addressing each situation that is presented to him.<sup>58</sup> There is no easy answer to ease the tension or magic bullet to make it go away completely. However, as the last thematic stressor is discussed, there are some principles which a pastor may find helpful to remember.

*Pastors Taking It Personally* – According to the survey, pastors are well aware of the choices they make and how those choices have a positive or a negative effect on their families. It's no secret, the workload can be tremendous. Pastors confessed feelings of guilt for work “not done” each day or expressed that they “could have/should have done more”. It is important to realize that the pastoral ministry from one perspective will always be a job that is “never done”. There will always be work to do. The devil is always willing to attack a pastor's sensitive conscience with feelings of inadequacy and failure.

This is why it's important to remember who really is in charge of the pastor and the ministry he is privileged to serve – the Lord Jesus. It's not wrong to plan or carry out a day-to-day schedule in the ministry, but it is wrong to think that we somehow become the infinite potter

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<sup>58</sup> Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 50.

instead of seeing ourselves as the finite jar of clay. The ministry existed long before each current pastor was called to service and will continue even as each pastor is called home to glory.

As a finite jar of clay, the pastor must be willing to consider and know his own limitations. He needs to realize how much time he has each day and manage himself accordingly.<sup>59</sup> Take a look at the day's or week's tasks, organize and prioritize them.<sup>60</sup> Say "no" to the unimportant or not-so important so that you can focus on doing good work on the things that require your attention.<sup>61</sup> Allot your hours to each task with care and try not to go beyond them.<sup>62</sup> Even one aspect of ministry can grow to consume an entire day if left unchecked. Schedule out board or council meetings with agenda time limits where possible. Also, schedule out family time. This is not meant to be an insult to family, but shows the pastor is aware he is also a husband and a father and that these callings have value.

Another aspect to every jar of clay is limited physical and mental strength and the necessity of rest and relaxation. Don't forget about the need to decompress. Perhaps, the pastor is sheepish about things like watching television, reading a book, power naps, and other recreation, because they may be perceived as being lazy. Being lazy or loafing is not being advocated. Time spent in these activities like time spent in an area ministry should be regulated, but the need is still there. If the body and mind are overworked, they will not function properly. So, consider carefully the circumstances for a late-night counseling session or last-minute meetings.

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<sup>59</sup> Henry Cloud & John Townsend, *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 201.

<sup>60</sup> Cloud, *Boundaries*, 200.

<sup>61</sup> Cloud, *Boundaries*, 202.

<sup>62</sup> Cloud, *Boundaries*, 202.

Emergencies aside, the pastor wants to serve his people faithfully but also effectively and that means taking care of body and mind.

Unfortunately, Scripture never says Jesus shot the breeze with his disciples or went on vacation. However, he did sleep (Mk 4:38), was hungry (Mk 11:12), went to a wedding – recreation (Jn 2), and withdrew from people (Lk 5:16). The Savior as true man encountered every limit of the human nature and was required to satisfy those needs of mind and body. Jesus wasn't always working during his earthly life, and a pastor shouldn't either.

A special limit of the pastoral office is confidentiality. Not all information can and should be shared, even with a spouse. There are Eighth Commandment issues as well as a pastor simply striving to love his members and act in their best interest. Permission to share personal matters should be granted, even when sharing medical information.<sup>63</sup> Even though the pastor's wife shares a unique role in the congregation, she does not share in all aspects of ministry, especially counseling. The pastor must be careful not to divulge information out of frustration or in simple conversation about his day at the office.<sup>64</sup>

Related to this limit is the inherent problem of leaving work at the office or “turning the work brain off” when the pastor gets home. This can lead to perceived emotional distance by the other spouse. Emotional distance can be a good thing in some cases, but should never be permanent.<sup>65</sup> This is where the brotherhood between classmates at seminary comes in handy. Call upon them for advice in situations. Since these ministry matters can't come home, keep them in appropriate confidence with a brother in the ministry.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 114-115.

<sup>64</sup> Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 272.

<sup>65</sup> Cloud, *Boundaries*, 38.

<sup>66</sup> Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 272.

To this end, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary through its Continuing Education Department (Grow in Grace) has established Pastor Partners Mentoring available to all seniors upon graduation. These pastoral mentors seek to provide more regular and focused ongoing support to a new young pastor over a three-year period.<sup>67</sup>

Looking at these four thematic stressors of ministry, it is realized that these will not be going away anytime soon. However, a pastor and his wife do not have to feel overwhelmed by them. Resources and work strategies are available to help, guide, and relieve. Your Savior also stands close to you not letting a single moment pass unawares under his watchful, compassionate eye. One pastor worded it this way: “Understand that there will be times when ministry requires more attention than marriage and vice versa. Remember that ministry like marriage, is a way of life. There are busy times and there is time for refreshing. Enjoy it all!”

### **Counseling**

**Question: Have you felt lonely or depressed in your marriage? If so, please explain.**

**Question: Have you sought or ever considered counseling for your marriage?**

| <b>Pastor</b>                   |               |
|---------------------------------|---------------|
| Lonely or Depressed             | 20 (67%)      |
| Sought or Considered Counseling | 5/20<br>(25%) |

| <b>Wife</b>                     |               |
|---------------------------------|---------------|
| Lonely or Depressed             | 16 (53%)      |
| Sought or Considered Counseling | 8/16<br>(50%) |

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<sup>67</sup> For more information, visit: <https://www.wls.wels.net/grow-in-grace/retreats-mentoring/>

In response to these questions, both spouses indicated that marriage was not always the initial cause of loneliness or depression. Some indicated ministry concerns, post-partum depression after pregnancy, or family history.

Whatever, the individual case may be, it is important to see that these things do happen. They should not be brushed off lightly. To be mentally healthy means a person feels the way he or she wants, is in control of his or her actions, and thinks realistically and optimistically.<sup>68</sup> There are many varieties of depression that can be the result of a combination of symptoms. *The Diagnostical and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) lists nine symptoms to categorize major depression. At least 5 of the 9 following symptoms must be experienced for two weeks to be diagnosed with an episode: persistent sadness, emptiness or boredom, feelings of worthlessness and guilt, lethargy, restless energy, insomnia, weight loss or gain, difficulty to concentrate, a sense of hopelessness, thoughts about death.<sup>69</sup> If anyone thinks they are experiencing a combination of these symptoms or knows their family history and are prone to episodes, please seek professional help.

Do not fall into social stigmas concerning mental illness. Studies show about 20% of adults and 20% of children suffer from some form of mental illness.<sup>70</sup> Mental illness is real.<sup>71</sup> It is not voluntary or a weakness in character.<sup>72</sup> There is help and treatment available, and there is

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<sup>68</sup> Stephen Saunders, *A Christian Guide To Mental Illness Volume I: Recognizing Mental Illness in the Church and School* (Milwaukee WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2016), 17.

<sup>69</sup> Saunders, *Mental Illness*, 72-73.

<sup>70</sup> Saunders, *Mental Illness*, 35-37.

<sup>71</sup> Saunders, *Mental Illness*, 423.

<sup>72</sup> Saunders, *Mental Illness*, 413-414.

no shame in seeking it.<sup>73</sup> It has nothing to do with your status before God and the faith you have in Christ.<sup>74</sup>

Pastors should not take a “Physician, heal thyself” attitude either. Just as you should refer congregation members to counseling according to circumstances, so you should seek counseling from a professional for yourself, spouse, or family. One wife surveyed gives this encouragement: “Make sure to talk to your medical professionals about your mental health. It’s such an overlooked problem for those in the ministry.” Another wife offers: “We went to counseling – it was a fantastic help for us.”

### **The Spiritual Component**

There is no better way to end this section than with the universal encouragement that all those surveyed at some point made evident: Stay in God’s Word. Grow in God’s Word. If you can’t be in the Scriptures together often, at least make sure it is on the personal schedule. Every believing child needs to come to the feet of the Savior for forgiveness, comfort, strength, and encouragement.

Growing in God’s Word means that pastor and wife grow in their knowledge of Scripture, but they also grow in their capacity to serve and support.<sup>75</sup> This is a struggle to maintain in every Christian’s life, but the target is even bigger in the realm of ministry. If the devil can slowly siphon and snuff faith out through general busyness or growing neglect and apathy, he will. Growth in God’s Word is not just a luxury, it is a necessity.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Saunders, *Mental Illness*, 39-40.

<sup>74</sup> Saunders, *Mental Illness*, 437-438.

<sup>75</sup> Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 43.

<sup>76</sup> Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 43.

Also mentioned in the surveys was the need for a good prayer life. Pray often, and pray specifically. Don't make it a cliché exercise. Pray for the success of the ministry around you. Pray for members. Pray for each other. Come before God's throne of grace knowing you have full and free access through Christ, your Savior.

Finally, there was acknowledgement that in ministry you face challenges and trials of all kinds. No Christian can escape living under the shadow of the cross. However, this is not a picture of doom and gloom for the Christian life. Through Christ's cross the church was blessed with salvation; so too through the Christian cross, he intends to bless his children richly.<sup>77</sup> One wife expressed it beautifully: "Every single trial is there to strengthen you: your love for each other; your confidence in moving forward with more trials to come; and especially your closeness to your (mutual) heavenly Father." God continue to draw us to himself, in his Word, and in prayer.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 44.

<sup>78</sup> Schuetze, *Doctor of Souls*, 44.

### CHAPTER 3:

#### THE BOUNTIFUL BLESSINGS OF MARRIAGE IN THE MINISTRY

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,” (Ps 107:1). In the midst of the stressors of ministry, the Lord in his grace and mercy throws open the storehouses to pastor and wife and blesses them beyond measure. Not only does he strengthen their faith through his Word and increase their love for him, he also increases their love for each other. The praises of the surveyed couples speak for themselves. Read and enjoy.

#### Fondness and Admiration

**Question: Describe qualities or other things you admire about your spouse.**

| <b>Pastor</b>  | <b>Wife</b>  |
|--|--|
| “She is passionate about a lot of things. She is a great mom. She cares about people and maintaining relationships. She is financially prudent and very wise.”   | “He is supportive, wise, stable, calm, handy, and creative.”   |
| “She is a believer and comes from things (money, raising children, etc.) from the same vantage point as me. I admire that she is supportive of me in my ministry and that she wants to help me wherever she can. She is an excellent teacher and has a great desire for helping children. I admire her desire to have a close-knit family, and she does what she can to stay close with her family. I admire that she is willing to try things that go outside of her comfort zone.” | “He always encourages me with God’s Word. He has a servant’s heart and truly loves to help those around him. He knows how to make me laugh. He’s an amazing dad to our four kids. He tries to make the most of his time at home. He’ll take ten minutes after dinner to play catch with our boys or color with our girls.” |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>“She is a fierce worker, has a strong faith, highly intelligent, extremely organized, beautiful body, good ties with both sides of the family, respects times when I need to grind through a ton of work, and wonderful with kids.”</p>  | <p>“He is level-headed, diplomatic, kind, patient, has nice eyes, quirky sense of humor, good with finances, hard worker, intelligent, a techie, good singer, has a good preaching style, etc.”</p>  |
| <p>“She is smart, loyal, beautiful, strong, sassy, a great cook, hard-working, awesome mother, extremely capable, can show tough love, understanding, faithful, and no nonsense. She keeps from being lazy and getting weird.”</p>  | <p>“He is kind, patient, and an excellent listener. People turn to him for help. He is good with kids, an excellent teacher, has a shepherd’s heart, is hard-working, and an overall awesome guy. I am so blessed to share him with God’s people.”</p>   |
| <p>“I admire my wife’s loyalty. I know she has my back no matter what, and the same could be said of her friends and family. I enjoy her sense of humor and that we can laugh at the same jokes. Her attention to detail is also a good thing. It frustrates me sometimes, because it seems obsessive but it’s good for me, because it keeps me from becoming apathetic about things. I admire her faith and that she loves her Savior. I am blessed to know she loves me.”</p> | <p>“As a pastor, he is very even-keeled. He is not overly emotional in volatile situations, but keeps his cool and manages his emotions well. I love that he pursues outside interests. He’s done a number of triathlons and is in better shape now at almost 39 than he was at 26 when we were married. I also love his sense of humor. It’s what attracted me to him in the first place (and good looks too).”</p> |

All responses were glowing with fondness and admiration – two crucial elements in a rewarding and long-lasting romance. Even though spouses can be distracted by flaws, they cherish each other.<sup>79</sup> Admiration and fondness show love and respect and are the best antidotes

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<sup>79</sup> Gottam, *Seven Principles*, 69.

for contempt.<sup>80</sup> Of course, always working and stirring the heart toward love is the Holy Spirit.

Pastors were then asked the following:

**Question: What perspective does your spouse have that helps you in ministry?**

| <b>Pastor</b>  |
|--|
| “Because she did not grow up WELS, she knows what it is like to want to know why we do what we do. She keeps the ministry fresh and practical for me.”   |
| “She grew up in a parsonage so she had already experienced the setbacks and disappointments of a ministry family. As a layman’s kid, this was all new to me.”  |
| “She can sometimes come up with ideas I hadn’t thought of or think of things in a better way.”   |
| “She will be the first to tell me to find someone to talk to if I need help. She doesn’t want me to hold it in.”   |
| “If I’m bothered by something at church, she often has a unique perspective to help me see something I hadn’t. (Without revealing confidential details, of course).”   |
| “She has an unwavering faith and points me to the heart of the matter when I face a ministry situation that is not confidential. She is excellent at reading people’s emotions, often noticing the warning signs of people facing relationship, work, or church issues.” |
| “She is supportive during my late nights of ministry. Her ability and willingness to talk with members and visitors at church is amazing and often mentioned to me. She has the desire to help where needed and where she is gifted, but not because she feels forced.”  |

“A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value ... Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate,” (Prov 31:10, 31).

**Sage Advice**

As couples enumerated blessing after blessing, it showed how the Lord has blessed each of them. Chastity, children, and companionship were listed as well as a home, friendships, health and wellness, opportunities for travel, pets, etc. (Perhaps, the only thing lacking was a little more

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<sup>80</sup> Gottam, *Seven Principles*, 71.

detail.) In their closing remarks, these couples were full of advice and perspective for other ministry couples. Read, smile, laugh, reflect, take to heart.

**Questions: What have you and your spouse done over the years to keep your marriage strong and healthy that might help others?  
Any other situations or advice you would like to offer other couples?**

| Pastor   | Wife  |
|--|---|
| <p>“Do not marry a clone of yourself. Respect differences in female and male brains. Discuss openly who will do what chores the best. Put technology down and talk to each other.”</p>                                 | <p>“Totally recommend taking long weekend trips (even for those in the parish). Pick a city, a bed and breakfast, hop in the car and go!”</p> <p>“Have a short memory. Get enough sleep. Do things together even if it’s just watching college basketball together when the kids are in bed, because you’re are too tired to do anything else.”</p>   |
| <p>“Date nights when you can. Weekends without the children if you live close to family. We don’t usually go anywhere but just give us to ourselves. Take time to be in the Word. We always need to do that more.”</p> | <p>“We have tried to maintain at least one night a month, and don’t talk about church related topics. Try to talk to each other more not just about kids and schedule.”</p> <p>“For the wife – You are who you are; you do not have to be who the congregation expects you to be.”</p> <p>“For the husband – Remember to pray for your wife. She is your support system and your ears. She learns more from the congregation just as an observer, and sometimes she will struggle with that.”</p> |
| <p>“You have to say no to certain ministry things. Stay in God’s Word together or separately. Find and block off time to communicate. Three nights maximum away from home schedule.”</p>                               | <p>“Be interested in the hobbies of the other spouse. Go on adventures together. Pray for each other. Verbally encourage each other.”</p> <p>“My biggest piece of advice would be for the husband/called worker to realize he doesn’t have to commit to every last conference, counseling session, or ladies meeting. A whole day off seems to refresh better than a chunk here or there.”</p>  |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p>“For the wife, try not to criticize or nag with regard to the husband’s call and family life.”</p>   |
| <p>“Forgive each other. Don’t take yourselves too seriously. Step away from the ministry from time to time. It’s okay. It’s not up to you, because it’s the Lord’s ministry. Smile, love, laugh. Help each other and your congregation.”</p>   | <p>“Pray a lot! Take timeouts from work for each other. Take vacations. Have some separate outside activities from one another. This gives you both cool stories to share with each other later. It doesn’t work if you are doing the same things.”</p> <p>“Have reasonable expectations for your church and ministry. Remember, you are there to serve. Keep that perspective and you won’t be hurt as often. Also, keep a healthy distance from church members. They can be friends but always be careful with what you share with them.”</p> |
| <p>“Attend marriage retreats locally. Friday lunches together. The book <i>Love and Respect</i> has really helped me understand how to deal with conflict in a healthy way in our relationship.”</p>   | <p>“Get on a budget right away. I know that it’s the husband’s call, but a wife is very important to her husband’s ministry. Meet people outside of your congregation. (We have great friends who are not members.)”</p>  |
| <p>“It’s important to cultivate and grow in your love life. Listen to each other. Exercise together. Give spiritual support to your wife.”</p> <p>“Get to know when to shut-up and give each other space”</p>  | <p>“As a pastor’s wife, be friendly to everybody. I’m a quiet person, but smiles go a long way.”</p> <p>“My husband keeps almost everything confidential, and I greatly appreciate it. When I do know “secrets”, I keep my mouth shut.”</p>   |
| <p>“I regret not making visits to my parents a higher priority. (They’re in heaven now.)”</p> <p>“Pastor – you are not indispensable. Someone can fill in for you on occasion. Had I had that attitude, maybe I’d have spent more time with family in another state.”</p> <p>“Learn to say ‘No.’”</p> <p>“Family plans ARE an important meeting you have. So, when you cannot meet with every other person, don’t be afraid to say: “I already have plans/another meeting.”</p> <p>“If you ruin your marriage because of ministry, you will lose both. Don’t be afraid to ask for help.”</p> | <p>“Take vacations. Take day trips.”</p> <p>“It is important to find people within the church that accept you as “real people” but also pastor and wife.”</p> <p>“Try to plan a monthly get together with other pastors’ wives. It is so important to air concerns and receive counsel.”</p> <p>“Learn to read your spouse so that when they are going through a rough time, you plan a day trip, dinner date, or just listen, encourage and support.”</p> <p>“Be yourself. Don’t try to be the ‘perfect pastor’s wife.’”</p>                   |

### **Take Aways**

*Forgiveness* – This is what the whole relationship is built on. Forgiveness flows from the foundation of Christ to each person individually and also from their spouse mutually. “Please forgive me” is just as important as “I love you”. Those words acknowledge the seriousness of an offense and seek resolution and restoration.<sup>81</sup> Sometimes forgiveness is quick to be grant to the spouse, sometimes not. Horizontal forgiveness can be a process. Both parties should attempt to resolve what is at issue. There can be a need for time and space, but ultimately forgiveness should be fostered and the couple reconciled to each other.<sup>82</sup>

*Use the Tools* – Use everything at your disposal to strengthen and preserve your marriage. Use devotions. Use marriage retreats. Use your sex life. Use a budget. Use babysitters. There are many helps out there, and it would be a shame not to take advantage of them.

*Have Fun* – That’s probably self-explanatory. Remember, it is no sin to step away from the ministry from time to time. It is a privilege that a clay jar gets to serve though he is dispensable. The Lord will still direct his ministry without you. Be content to do, but also be content to be still and observe from the sidelines. The coach will call you up when it’s time to go in again.

### **Marriage and Ministry are Experiential**

Some of those surveyed made a very important point. Marriage and ministry are both experiential. In other words, they both must be lived day to day. Resources can only prepare spouses for generalities. Their own setting will provide its own unique blend of life and ministry.

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<sup>81</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 161.

<sup>82</sup> Earley, *14 Secrets*, 165.

Still, they can be comforted by the experiences of others and draw on wisdom as it applies to them. Although there is one unchanging constant that has fueled both marriage and ministry since the Garden of Eden: The loving triune God who preserves believing spouses and his Church through his Word and Sacraments, and who uses the most beautiful of human relationships to show how much he loves. God continue to uphold and strengthen all who cling to him.

## CONCLUSION

What gifts the Father has lavished on us! Creating male and female, each with their own tendencies, abilities, and even quirks. How beautifully he brings them together, preserving them and society through his gift of marriage.

How beautiful is the gift of public ministry through which he allows clay jars to proclaim his ever-living gospel! It is a privilege, though those he uses are unworthy, dispensable stewards who cling to that same gospel for comfort and life.

How unique then is the marriage of pastor and wife. It is something that maybe from the outside doesn't look like anything extraordinary or long-lasting. Yes, there are stressors, challenges, and difficulties. There are things you should know and be aware of. However, there is Christ – at the center of marriage and at the center of ministry. From him flows forgiveness and strength like no other.

He upholds and carries both pastor and wife, even when worries and concerns threaten to overtake them. Through trials he allows, he only desires to send them back into his word and back into communication with him through prayer. Even as he does this, he pours out grace upon grace and blessing after blessing. What a mighty God they serve!

Thank you to all the couples who took the time to give their wisdom and counsel through surveys. Regardless of what stage of marriage or ministry you are in, readers be encouraged. Ministry and marriage are and will remain blessings on this earth. For the LORD directs the affairs of both. Do not be afraid! He walks with you, giving you everything you need, so that you may give him glory. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

APPENDIX A

*The Pastor and His Wife: Fortifying Marriage Against the Demands of Ministry*

**Pastor Survey**

**Directions:**

1. Be honest and forthright with your answers.
  2. DO NOT complete this survey with your spouse.
  3. Write neatly and legibly.
  4. Feel free to continue any answers on another sheet of paper.
  5. Return by Friday, November 2<sup>nd</sup> by email or designated envelope.
- 

1. How many years have you been married?
2. How many of those years have been in the ministry?
3. Describe the size and setting of your congregation.  
(Large, medium, small, urban, rural, mission, etc.)
4. How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_ What are their ages?
5. Approximately, how many hours do you work per week?
6. Does the congregation designate or allow you a day off during the week? Do you feel you could ask for one?
7. On average, how many nights are you home during the week? (for supper, children's bedtime, etc.)
8. Do you communicate with your wife about your work schedule? If so, how often?
9. Do you feel obligated to have a hand in all aspects of church business?
10. Are you able to delegate ministry tasks to congregation members, or is it pretty much "do it yourself"?

11. List and describe any ministry stressors that you feel affect your marriage.
12. Are there things you know now in ministry and marriage that you wish you knew at the start? Please describe.
13. Do you feel your spouse is concerned for your well-being while you serve as pastor?
14. Can you turn to your wife for support when you face ministry challenges?
15. Have there been times you felt distant from your wife for any reason? If so, please explain.
16. Have there been times you thought your marriage was in crisis? If so, please explain.
17. Have you felt lonely or depressed in your marriage? If so, please explain.
18. Have you sought or ever considered counseling for your marriage?
19. Do you and your spouse have devotional time together?
20. When was the last time you went on a date or had quality time with your spouse?
21. Describe qualities or other things you admire about your spouse.
22. What perspective does your spouse have that helps you in ministry?
23. In what aspects of ministry is your wife involved? (shut-in or member visits, service projects, etc.)
24. Describe some blessings the Lord has brought to your marriage over the years.
25. What things have you and your spouse done over the years to keep your marriage strong and healthy that might help others?
26. Any other situations or advice you would like to offer other couples?

## APPENDIX B

### *The Pastor and His Wife: Fortifying Marriage Against the Demands of Ministry*

## Wife Survey

### **Directions:**

1. Be honest and forthright with your answers.
  2. DO NOT complete this survey with your spouse.
  3. Write neatly and legibly.
  4. Feel free to continue any answers on another sheet of paper.
  5. Return by Friday, November 2<sup>nd</sup> by email or designated envelope.
- 

1. How many years have you been married?
2. How many of those years have been in the ministry?
3. Describe the size and setting of your congregation.  
(Large, medium, small, urban, rural, mission, etc.)
4. How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_ What are their ages?
5. Approximately, how many hours does your husband work per week?
6. Does the congregation give or allow your husband a day off during the week?
7. On average, how many nights is your husband home during the week? (for supper, children's bedtime, etc.)
8. Does your husband communicate with you about his work schedule? If so, how often?
9. List and describe any ministry stressors that you feel affect your marriage.
10. Are there things you know now in ministry and marriage that you wish you knew at the start? Please describe.

11. Are you able to communicate your worries and concerns to your husband?
12. Have there been times you felt distant from your husband for any reason? If so, please explain.
13. Have there been times you thought your marriage was in crisis? If so, please explain.
14. Have you felt lonely or depressed in your marriage? If so, please explain.
15. Have you sought or ever considered counseling for your marriage?
16. Do you and your spouse have devotional time together?
17. When was the last time you went on a date or had quality time with your spouse?
18. Describe qualities or other things you admire about your spouse.
19. Describe some blessings the Lord has brought to your marriage over the years.
20. What things have you and your spouse done over the years to keep your marriage strong and healthy that might help others?
21. Any other situations or advice you would like to offer other couples?

## APENDIX C

### SURVEY LETTER

Thursday, October 11, 2018

Dear Husband and Wife united in Christ,

My name is Zach Steinke. I'm a senior at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary looking forward to spring graduation. I pray both of you are well as you serve in your God-given callings.

I have chosen to write my thesis this semester looking at the marriage between pastor and wife: *The Pastor and His Wife: Fortifying Marriage Against the Demands of Ministry*. As the title suggests, the thesis will highlight concerns and difficulties, but also give opportunity to express blessings and joys of your marriage. It is hoped with your willing participation and valuable input that seminary couples and others already serving in the ministry might be able to be aware of marriage challenges that they might encounter, as husband and wife strive to be a blessing to their spouse and a blessing to their church.

Prof. John Schuetze is advising me on this project. He has previewed the questions this survey contains and offered feedback. It is realized that some of these questions are personal in nature and may be uncomfortable to answer. However, I encourage both of you to be as honest and forthright as possible. The purpose of these surveys is not to shame anyone but to show that struggles in marriage are real, even for pastor and wife. Secondly, the survey seeks to encourage couples in strengthening their marriage. If there are ways and methods that work for you, they could help others. Both ministry and marriage are blessings of God, and we dare not forget that.

As you prayerfully consider the surveys, I want you both to know that you have been randomly selected, unless you have spoken to me or my wife previously. Total anonymity will be given to everyone who participates. **Your names and location will not be used** in the paper or thesis presentation. Once all the data from the surveys has been collected, analyzed, and reported, **the surveys will be destroyed**.

Enclosed, you will find two surveys – one for each of you. Please follow the directions as indicated. You will also find a disclosure form to sign and an appropriately addressed return envelope with postage for the disclosure form and completed surveys. Please have all items postmarked by **Friday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>**. If you would rather like to send me an email with the survey information, my address is: **zachsteinke@gmail.com**. Should you have any questions, please email or call me: **(574) 514-6905**.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me with this project. God be praised for your courage to speak on this topic of your marriage as you serve in the ministry. May he bless, strengthen, and shield you with his love as you continue to reflect his grace to others.

Yours in Christ,

Zach Steinke

Enclosures

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR SURVEYEEES**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to investigate the marriage of a pastor and his wife in the parish ministry. It is being conducted by Zach Steinke as part of the Senior Thesis requirement at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. In this research, you will be asked to respond to some questions about your marriage and your ministry. The purpose of this information is to provide the surveyor, Zach Steinke, with a greater understanding of this matter and may be included in the paper. Please understand that your participation in this research is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time.

Your names and location of ministry will not be used.

Your information will not be shared outside of the thesis project.

Upon analysis and reporting of data, these surveys will be destroyed.

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate.

Pastor's Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Wife's Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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