

GLORIA FURMAN



*Strengthened by Grace for  
a Life of Love*

STUDY GUIDE

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*Strengthened by Grace for  
a Life of Love*

**Study Guide**

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Study guide for *The Pastor's Wife: Strengthened by Grace for a Life of Love*

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# Introduction

Others' expectations—we all feel the weight of them, perhaps none more strongly than pastors' wives. Part of the problem is the fact that so many of those expectations are unrealistic. So how do we handle it? How can pastors' wives respond to those who try to define for us our life and ministry? Here, at the very beginning of this study, we begin to learn the difference between people's expectations and what God has clearly called us to pursue.

*“Just thinking about expectations can make a minister's wife want to throw in the dishtowel at the first potluck.”*

1. According to Gloria, what do pastors' wives need most?

2. The apostle Paul writes:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:14–21)

As you ponder that passage, how does it alter your perspective on your life and the people in it?

PART 1

# Loving the Chief Shepherd

## “But You’re the Pastor’s Wife”

When we’re introduced to someone, the first thing we’re often asked is, “What do you do?” We tend to define people by their calling in life and the measure of success they achieve in the process of living it out. But the way God’s Word defines us is radically different, and it’s really the only definition that matters.

*“No longer your own, you are now  
defined by whose you are.”*

1. How does the Bible’s definition of who we are differ from how the world defines us and how we often define ourselves?

2. How do you typically answer when someone asks, “Who are you?” How do Romans 3:21–26; Galatians 4:7; and 1 John 4:10 provide the answer to that question?

3. What does it mean to be “in Christ”? How does being united to him supply our identity?

4. Gloria writes, "Being a Christian is neither a label nor an area of interest nor a matter of personal opinion" (p. 29). So what does it mean to be a Christian?

5. How do we avoid living out the wrong identity?

6. How does living out our Christian identity relieve us of fear, anxiety, and insecurity?

7. How can recognizing in ourselves a lackluster affection for God be a blessing in disguise?

8. The apostle Paul writes, "You know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed" (Romans 13:11). In what way do you need to "wake from sleep"? Where has your gaze been focused inward rather than upward?

9. Gloria points out that the life of a pastor's wife is lived in a "fishbowl." How is this fact both positive and negative? How does Matthew 5:16—"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven"—reshape our thinking about living in a fishbowl?

## On Inheriting a Kingdom of Idols and Expectations

Much of our personal disappointment comes not because we lack something we need or because someone let us down—it comes because we set our heart on what we think should happen and on having things work out the way we hope, and in the process we enslave ourselves. Our *real* need is to be delivered from going after false gods.

*“Tasting and seeing Jesus is the  
expulsive, new affection that drives  
out our love affair with our idols.”*

1. How would you answer Gloria’s question: “Why are we so prone to setting up false expectations for ourselves or for others?” (p. 40)

2. What patterns of thinking tend to enslave us? Why are we so naturally inclined to those enslaving thoughts?

3. In Paul’s sermon at Mars Hill, he said:

Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:29–31)

How do his words deal a deathblow to self-worship?

4. Gloria writes, "Serving alongside your husband in ministry may present you with great temptation toward idolatry" (p. 44). What particular idols are you most tempted by as you serve?

5. What joyful motivation can put our idols to death?

6. Gloria provides some clues for identifying possible idols in our lives. How would you answer her questions?

- When has a ministry activity, accomplishment, or title become more important in your heart than God?
  
- What about ministry seems to give your life meaning or worth?
  
- What activity, if it were taken from you, would devastate you?
  
- Do you feel you *must* have this ministry to be happy?
  
- Do you need to enjoy the approval of the leaders in your church in order to enjoy life?
  
- Do you feel burdened to represent your husband and family as a public relations manager would?

7. Why do idols always leave us wanting?

8. Consider both columns in the chart below. Describe how you have experienced these truths in your own experience.

|                                |                              |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Idols take life                | Jesus gives life             |
| Idols deceive                  | God's Word gives truth       |
| The world reinforces our idols | The gospel exposes our idols |
| Idols enslave                  | Jesus liberates              |
| Idols are temporary            | Jesus is eternal             |

9. Paul instructs: "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:23-24). How does that passage work to free us from slavery to the opinions of others?

10. What truths from Scripture free us from using our ministry to define ourselves?

## Stay Close to Your Shepherd, Little Sheep

The pressures and demands on pastors' wives are seemingly endless. For that reason, we need somewhere to turn to—someone—for comfort and encouragement. Only one can sustain us adequately, and that is Jesus. He is the Good Shepherd who leads, guides, and feeds us.

*“If the Lord is your shepherd,  
he will not leave you wanting.”*

### 1. Read Psalm 23 and list every gift of grace you see there:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. | your rod and your staff,                   |
| He makes me lie down in green pastures.    | they comfort me.                           |
| He leads me beside still waters.           | You prepare a table before me              |
| He restores my soul.                       | in the presence of my enemies;             |
| He leads me in paths of righteousness      | you anoint my head with oil;               |
| for his name's sake.                       | my cup overflows.                          |
| Even though I walk through the valley      | Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  |
| of the shadow of death,                    | all the days of my life,                   |
| I will fear no evil,                       | and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD |
| for you are with me;                       | forever.                                   |

### 2. What traits of sheep and shepherds are shown in the following passages:

As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the

strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. (Ezekiel 34:12-16)

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers. (John 10:1-5)

3. Where do you find personal comfort in the above passages?

4. Why are there no grounds for boasting about our role, our family, or our accomplishments?

5. How does Gloria explain the groaning that Paul writes of in Romans 8:22-23?

6. How does Philippians 2:13—"It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure"—shed comforting light on our present difficulties?

7. Do you live with a hopeful expectation of future glory, such as John expressed: "He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20)? If not, why? What can help you to set your heart there?

PART 2

## Loving an Under-Shepherd

## On Doing Him Good (and Not Harm)

If you are married to a man in ministry, it's because God has called you to fill that role. And along with his call comes the enabling to carry it out. We can embrace all it means to be a wife—a helper—with joy, because God has promised to provide all we need to live within his wise design.

*“When the posture of your heart is  
not one of humble submission to  
the Chief Shepherd’s sovereign will,  
everyone else’s grass looks greener.”*

1. Gloria writes, “Wives of men in ministry have a God-given calling and enablement to serve their husband” (p. 68). Have you considered this before? Do you find yourself embracing Gloria’s words, or do you struggle with them?

2. Gloria confesses that her struggle with the “helper” mandate in Genesis 2:18—“Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him’”—isn’t about the call to help her husband but rather about who will help *her* (p. 70). Do you resonate with her struggle? What other issues or concerns cause you or women you know to struggle with embracing God’s design? What lies at the root of our struggle to joyfully live out our role as helper?

3. What in the following passages enables us to carry out our calling with joy?

I lift up my eyes to the hills.  
From where does my help come?

My help comes from the LORD,  
who made heaven and earth. (Psalm 121:1-2)

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say,

"The Lord is my helper;  
I will not fear;  
what can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:5-6)

4. What is the primary ministry of a pastor's wife? How can having a firm conviction about the nature of this ministry help us determine what additional responsibilities to take on?

5. Do you readily acknowledge your need of personal shepherding, or do you find such acknowledgment difficult? What particular pressures might make such an acknowledgment difficult for a pastor's wife?

6. Reflect on Titus 2:3-5:

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

Where do you see yourself currently in terms of Paul's admonition here: older woman, younger woman, or both? What steps do you need to take to more fully live out the instructions in this passage?

7. How have the women in your life served as instruments of your sanctification? Give specific examples.

8. Gloria reveals a particular truth that revolutionized her perspective on being a pastor's wife in ministry with her husband: "It is not as though you (singular) each have a ministry, but that you (plural) have a ministry together" (p. 79). How does having a "plural" mind-set enhance your ministry, your marriage, and your personal well-being?

## Undergirding the Overseer

The New Testament provides pastors with a job description, specific responsibilities that will build God's kingdom and bring glory to God. Although the New Testament highlights the work of men in ministry, we wives are not left out. That's because our own duties are bound up with theirs. And it's here that pastors' wives find the number-one priority of their own calling.

*"Grace carries you along  
and frees you to be a cheerful  
helper to your husband."*

1. Before entering into ministry with your husband, how did you envision his role as pastor? How has the reality differed from what you expected?

2. What truth provides dignity to our call to support our husbands as they carry out their pastoral duties?

3. In chapter 5 Gloria draws heavily from 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Read those chapters in a single sitting. What jumps out at you as personal reproof and instruction?

4. Christian men are called to manage their households (1 Timothy 3:4). What truth underlies this principle that enables you to encourage your husband to fulfill this requirement?

5. Why is embracing God's design for marriage *only* for the faint of heart?

6. In what way is a wife's submission to her husband more than just a picture of the church's submission to Christ?

7. How can we support our husbands in their call to teach the Word?

8. Review 2 Timothy 2:3-10:

Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

From that passage, what are some specific things we can pray for our husbands' preaching ministry?

## So, You Married the Man Who Marries People

Ministries rise and fall on reputation. And everything we do is under scrutiny. People scrutinize a pastor—and his wife. The pressure to do and say God-glorifying things is enormous, which is why it's such a relief that God hasn't left us to ourselves.

*“As a wife of a minister, you know  
that eyes are watching you.”*

1. Gloria writes, “When we are preoccupied with circumstances, we miss the real grace that is available to us” (p. 97). How can we counter our tendency toward self-preoccupation?

2. Why does it matter how unbelievers view us?

3. As you ponder the following passages, in what practical ways can you glorify God through your lifestyle?

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. (Ephesians 5:15–16)

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. (Colossians 4:5)

Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:7)

4. Discuss the differences between how the world sees hospitality and how Scripture defines it.

5. What are your personal roadblocks to offering hospitality? Review 2 Corinthians 9:6-9:

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written,

“He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;  
his righteousness endures forever.”

6. How does that passage change your perspective on showing hospitality?

7. Gloria writes, “Everyone who belongs to God through Christ belongs to everyone else who belongs to God” (p. 104). What is the foundation for this truth, and how is it worked out in your marriage and other relationships?

PART 3

# Loving the Bride of Christ



- 1 Peter 2:5-6

4. What does it mean practically to be a member of a church? How does Paul's metaphor of the human body (Romans 12:4-5) help us know how to live out true membership?

5. Review Ephesians 4:11-13:

He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

How do Christ's goals for the church, as shown in that passage, differ from our goals for our particular church body?

6. Why is it important to constantly remind ourselves of who and what the church is?

7. What instruction is given to us through Jesus's example in Hebrews 13:12-14?

So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

8. What “reproaches” have you endured as a pastor’s wife, and how have you responded? How does the Hebrews passage encourage you to persevere?

9. Discuss how you can apply the exhortation found here:

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.  
(Hebrews 10:24-25)

## Gifted to Give What God Has Given

Small things are often big things in God's economy. That includes the gifts we have and how we use them. Sometimes the things we do for others seem so, well, unimportant. But no act of kindness and nothing done in love and in Jesus's name lacks eternal value.

*"Good stewardship starts  
and ends with a biblical per-  
spective on our gifts."*

1. Gloria recounts an incident when she at first regretted telling a group of women about her faith and call to ministry (pp. 120–21). What changed her outlook about that conversation? How does her story both challenge and encourage you to live out your calling with boldness? Is there a particular situation in your life to which this story speaks?

2. What are some causes of "giver's remorse"? When and how have you been affected by giver's remorse?

3. Review the following passage pertaining to spiritual gifts:

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God

supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:10–11)

How does this passage challenge you? What makes such service possible?

4. Gloria writes, “Honest service gives credit where it is due” (p. 126). Elaborate on what she means.

5. What is unbiblical about allowing our God-given gifts to atrophy? Why is this never necessary? (See p. 127)

6. How does having an all-encompassing kingdom orientation change our outlook on small acts of service?

## Weakness Finders and Christ's Sufficient Strength for Service

God has given each one of us particular gifts for the purpose of building his kingdom, but at times we don't put them to use. Sometimes that's because we find ourselves overwhelmed by day-to-day cares; other times, we simply believe we have nothing useful to offer. But the one who has given us unique gifts provides all we need to put our gifts to use—not just someday but now.

*“The bigger question we need  
to ask when we think about  
how we are to serve the church  
and use our gifts is, Who?”*

1. Gloria learned from a wise friend, “God is the giver of not only the gifts we use to serve but the service opportunities themselves” (p. 132). How does this reality address your present circumstances?

2. What mind-set enables us to carry out our calling in every season of life?

3. Gloria points out that “we tend to assess our potential for serving in ministry by looking at our unique abilities” (p. 135). Why do we do this? What focus radically alters that perspective?



# Conclusion

*Here Comes the Bridegroom!*

When duty calls—yet again—and we feel overwhelmed, wondering how we can carry on one more day, much less many more years, there is hope to strengthen us. And on those days when we wonder whether we made the right choice for our lives, we can be sure we did.

*“There is no amount of God-honoring selflessness that you can muster apart from Jesus.”*

1. Gloria writes, “The church is the only bride who doesn’t have to worry about what she is going to wear” (p. 144). Explain what she means.

2. What is distinctive about Christian love? Derive your answer from John 15:9–14:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

3. Gloria sums up her message to pastors' wives this way: "The life that our loving heavenly Father has ordained for you will come along with divine appointments that expect much from you but never, ever, ever more than what God can supply" (p. 146). Name some of the ways God manifests his supply.

4. Why is Revelation 19:1–9 an especially fitting passage for a pastor's wife to memorize? Conclude this study by memorizing it:

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out,

"Hallelujah!  
Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,  
for his judgments are true and just;  
for he has judged the great prostitute  
who corrupted the earth with her immorality,  
and has avenged on her the blood of his servants."

Once more they cried out,

"Hallelujah!  
The smoke from her goes up forever and ever."

And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" And from the throne came a voice saying,

"Praise our God,  
all you his servants,  
you who fear him,  
small and great."

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

"Hallelujah!  
For the Lord our God  
the Almighty reigns.  
Let us rejoice and exult  
and give him the glory,  
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,  
and his Bride has made herself ready;  
it was granted her to clothe herself  
with fine linen, bright and pure"—  
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."