

FOREWORD BY RAY ORTLUND

Help!

I'm Married to My Pastor

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR
MINISTRY WIVES AND THOSE
WHO LOVE THEM

Jani Ortlund



“While being a pastor’s wife is not an office in the church, it comes with hidden expectations and undefined responsibilities. While knowing intimately that the integrity of the man behind the pulpit holds enormous blessings, living in the constant, unyielding spotlight can weary the soul. A pastor’s wife must learn how to feed on the word of God, turn the other cheek, cling to Christ, embrace the means of grace, protect her children from criticism and callings that they did not choose, and support a husband whose calling demands he lay down his life again and again. And all of this is done in the public eye. A pastor’s wife needs a trustworthy friend, and she will find that friend in Jani Ortlund’s book. Jani’s wisdom has been refined by almost fifty years of being the wife of her pastor. Her writing style is simple, straightforward, and sane. Practical, poignant, and personal, this book is—like Jani—wise and tender and most of all, faithful to the call of Christ to join in the ‘fellowship of His sufferings’ (Phil. 3:10 NKJV). I love this book.”

Rosaria Butterfield, Former Professor of English, Syracuse University; author, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*

“Ministry wives today face both joys and challenges as they navigate their calling. Would that we could sit down with Jani Ortlund and learn from her wealth of wisdom from nearly fifty years of experience as an excellent wife alongside her pastor husband, Ray Ortlund. This book is the next best thing! Each short chapter tackles a timely challenge and then answers it biblically and specifically. Jani is one of the Lord’s sweetest servants, and she embraces the high calling to be a pastor’s wife to the glory of God. Jani loves Jesus and draws others to him. Jani loves Ray and inspires all of us who are ministry wives to serve more enthusiastically as we swim against the tide. Her writings are a gift. I am particularly eager to share this encouraging book with student wives as they prepare to serve our Lord and his church.”

Mary K. Mohler, Director, Seminary Wives Institute, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; author, *Growing in Gratitude*

“I am thankful for this special and much-needed book—fresh, joyous, and written by someone who has been there and not found God to be wanting. What an encouragement to us ministry wives! It made me glad to be a pastor’s wife, strengthened my hands for the work, and made me want to share this with my husband.”

Carolyn Ash, wife of Christopher Ash, Writer-in-Residence, Tyndale House, Cambridge

“Oh, my goodness! I was hooked from the foreword to the very last prayer. I already knew I was going to love this book from my interaction with the gracious author, Jani Ortlund. However, I must say, this book exceeded my expectations! It is written with such warmth, humor, understanding, and grace. It is a must for every pastor’s wife. Jani offers sage advice comingled with gentleness, understanding, affirmation, and oodles of encouragement. I plan on buying numerous copies of this book for women I know whose husbands are in God’s service. Every chapter brought tears to my eyes, a smile to my face, and joy to my heart!”

Cheryl Brodersen, speaker; Bible teacher; Host, *Living Grace*; wife of Brian Brodersen, Pastor, Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, California

“If you’ve lived as a ministry wife for more than ten seconds, you’ll likely know how incredibly rewarding yet exceedingly difficult it can be. Jani Ortlund definitely does! This wonderful book is a treasure chest overflowing with refreshing, practical gems of wisdom, advice, and encouragement from a woman who has been there. Jani knows how to read the emotional dashboard of life as a ministry wife and then point us back to Jesus. Read this book slowly and soak up these truths; you’ll find fuel for your journey and joy along the way.”

Kristina Ramsey, pastor’s wife and church planter, Liberty Church, Gold Coast, Australia

“The church is often aware of the chaos that comes with being a pastor, but the struggles of a pastor’s wife are often overlooked. Jani Ortlund’s motherly affection for younger pastors’ wives shines through in *Help! I’m Married to My Pastor*. She disciples us at the turning of every page with her godly wisdom and love.”

Nikki Daniel, wife of Bert Daniel, Pastor, Crawford Avenue Baptist Church, Augusta, Georgia

“Jani Ortlund invites pastors’ wives and ministry leaders to drink from her deep well of biblical, practical wisdom. This book is a winsome reminder of why we must press on in our calling despite real hardships along the way. Jani is running with us, coaching us to press on toward the goal because Christ is worth it. Every married woman in ministry will be spurred to the finish line through her mentoring in *Help! I’m Married to My Pastor*. It’s been added to my list of must-read books to equip and encourage women. I joyfully recommend it!”

Leslie Bennett, Director of Women’s Ministry Initiatives,
Revive Our Hearts

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*Encouragement for
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To Ray Ortlund Jr.
The truest and best of his generation
and the Christlike pastor I get to be married to.
I'm forever grateful.

Help! I Want to Fix Him

AS A MINISTRY WIFE, you have the privilege of knowing intimately a man going hard after God and his word, a man who strives week after week, year after year, to communicate all that God gives him to the people God brings into his life.

Your Most Important Ministry in God's Kingdom Work

Now some would not think that knowing such a man intimately is such a great privilege. I once heard a ministry wife comment, "Clergy ought to be celibate because no decent right-minded man would have the effrontery to ask any woman to take on such a lousy job. It is thoroughly unchristian!"

It may be difficult, but it is not lousy.

It may be exhausting, but it is not indecent.

It may even be painful, but it is not unchristian.

Your marriage is God's gift to you. And it is a good and perfect gift. Your most important ministry in God's kingdom work is not to your church or even to your children. Your most important ministry is to your husband.¹ The best

service you can offer to God's work in your generation is to be the most loving, fun, and supportive person your pastor will ever know.

Two Responses

We all want to be that kind of wife, but what about those vital areas where you think that your husband needs to adjust and change? What can you do when you want to help your husband by fixing him?

Following are two responses I've shown Ray, and I have found them most helpful when I've been tempted to fix him. You might want to try them too.

1. Show Him Appreciation and Loyalty

Extend grace to your pastor husband. He needs to be almost perfect for everyone else. Be a safe place for him to land.

When you live with constant pressure day after day, the tendency is to withdraw into your own protective castle surrounded by your personalized moat of defenses. It is my privilege as Ray's wife to be the one person to gain access to his castle by enticing him to let down his drawbridge. It's a learning process. Sometimes I storm in; sometimes I steal in. Whatever it takes in *your* marriage, learn the secret of getting in. And one clear pathway of access to his heart is to truly appreciate what he is trying to do with his life.

Your husband needs to know that you think he is really wonderful. Speak well of him to friends and family. Praise him in front of your kids. Is he late for dinner again? You have one of two ways to respond:

“*Poor me*—he’s late again!” (as you bang the dishes onto the table).

Or

“*Poor Daddy*—let’s pray for him. He must be so hungry and tired. Who can help me fix a plate for him to keep warm in the oven?”

Honor the work that he is doing by being flexible and respectful.

2. Accept Him as He Is

Men interpret advice as lack of approval. And your husband will get plenty of advice from others—his coworkers, his congregants, his family, even his Twitter followers! He needs to know you are on his side, that he’s not standing alone. Let others try to improve him. In your eyes he needs to be okay. He is most likely all too aware of his own shortcomings anyway.

I am a fixer by nature. And besides that, people used to try to get to Ray through me, especially women. “I know how busy Ray is. Please tell him . . .” And they would go on with some complaint turned into a suggestion. Somehow I would try to let him know what they had told me, from which side of his suit coat he should put his name tag on, to how to pronounce a missionary’s name, to who should be our next women’s ministry leader. I tried to fix him according to their desires so that everyone would be happy. Hah! Now there’s a demented fantasy.

I did try, that is, until one Sunday night after a very long week of intense ministry (and there I was fussing at him again over some insignificant recommendation from a congregant), he turned to me, took me in his arms, and fixed his big blue eyes on me, saying, “Darling, I need to know there is one person in this messy world who isn’t trying to change me, who really likes me for who I am, even with my imperfections—someone willing to let the Holy Spirit be the main source of change in my life. Would you be willing to be that person for me?” You can imagine my response. Boy, was I! I certainly didn’t want anyone else stepping up to apply for that position!

So I had to learn to say to others, “That’s an interesting idea. Why don’t you give the office a call and set up an appointment to discuss this with Ray? It would be much better coming directly from you than through me.”

If there is something that you feel really needs changing, pray earnestly and often about it. Ask our wise Father to reveal it to your man through his Spirit or through another servant who works closely with him. And then you will have the glorious joy of seeing your pastor grow through the power of the Holy Spirit rather than the pain of a nagging wife.

Guard Your Spirit

Think of the blessings of marriage. You are chosen by someone, and you have the chance to choose someone for yourself. You enter into a relationship of trust and comfort and joy. You belong somewhere and with someone. You live out your own shared history. Marriage makes two people together what they

could never be alone. Your shared love costs you more than you ever thought, but I promise it can give you more than you ever dreamed!

Yet in the midst of these blessings we face real disappointments:

- limited income
- a crazy schedule
- job insecurity
- spiritual malaise
- conflicts with the in-laws
- less than thrilling times of intimacy
- his inability to anticipate or even understand your needs
- the never-ending cares of his flock

How can you handle these disappointments? What is the antidote for the “fix-him fever” that attacks your spirit?

Begin by embracing the biblical reality that marriage is an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person. That commitment means a willingness to sometimes be unhappy. And in that unhappiness you must guard your spirit (Malachi 2:15). Unhappiness is not the worst experience in a marriage—unfaithfulness is.

The Ultimate Human Experience

I have been talking about making the most of your ministry marriage. But ultimately your marriage will be *only* as happy and satisfying and passionate as your relationship with Christ is.

In the hurts and disappointments of life, is Jesus enough, or are you looking to something else to save you from your loneliness or sadness or insecurity?

At times your love may be soured by the inevitable disappointments of living as one flesh with another human being. When that happens, look ahead to your heavenly husband, the lover of your soul, who loves you completely even as you are. He paid the greatest bride price imaginable to capture your heart and bring you into his loving embrace.

A woman is most beautiful when she knows she is loved. Your femininity is most radiant, nurturing, gracious, and other-centered when you know you are loved. Let God make you, through his tender and intimate love, the beautiful woman he created you to be.

And where do we find that love? Where do we warm our hearts with the love of God? At the foot of the cross. Never be content with your current grasp of the cross. Never feel that you have grown beyond your need for the cross. Keep close enough to the cross so that you can daily feel the warmth of God's redeeming love for you.

The most helpful way you can support and help, rather than trying to fix, the man God brought into your life is to find your soul's deepest fulfillment in Christ. If God's redeeming love is truly filling your heart, then God himself will be the ultimate human experience, not a perfect ministry or sterling reputation or sparkling marriage or you name it! "For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation" (Psalm 62:1). Why not come to God anew today? Ask him to restore your soul (Psalm 23:3) in fresh and intimate ways that

will support a more deeply satisfying relationship with your heavenly husband.

————— A LETTER TO YOUR PASTOR —————

Dear Pastor,

Describe to your wife some of the current pressures you are under. She wants to be the most fun, loving, and supportive person in your life. But she may need some coaching. Use words like, “I feel supported when you . . .” or “I feel accepted by you when . . .”

Talk through strategies she could use when well-meaning people try to get to you through her. And then affirm her as she rises up from the “fix-him fever” to go hard after God together with you, more united than ever.

From a former fix-him-fever fanatic,

Jani

Ministry is hard. And every ministry wife needs—and deserves—encouragement.



A woman marries a man, not his ministry. But all too often her husband's calling complicates their life together. What if ministry life isn't what she bargained for? What happens when her children make mistakes? How does she deal with church gossip, or even slander?

As a pastor's wife of almost fifty years, Jani Ortlund addresses these questions, along with many others, as she offers encouragement and guidance to ministry wives. Jani reminds readers that God works out his delightfully good purposes in and through their sacrifices.

“Practical, poignant, and personal, this book is—like Jani—wise and tender and most of all, faithful to the call of Christ to join in the ‘fellowship of His sufferings’ (Philippians 3:10 NKJV). I love this book.”

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LESLIE BENNETT

Director of Women's Ministry Initiatives, Revive Our Hearts

Jani Ortlund is a well-known writer and conference speaker. She worships at Immanuel Church Nashville with her husband, Ray, who serves as a pastor to pastors. Jani, a former schoolteacher, holds a master's degree in education and serves as executive vice president at Renewal Ministries. The Ortlunds have four children and fifteen grandchildren.

WOMEN / CHRISTIAN LIVING

