

GLORIA FURMAN



*Strengthened by Grace for  
a Life of Love*

“This book is a breath of fresh air, not because it’s personal (which it is), or because it’s practical (which it is), but because it is profoundly biblical. We found Gloria’s Scripture-saturated counsel to be eminently realistic and deeply encouraging. Her wit and wisdom will be good for the pastor and good for the pastor’s wife, which is good news for those in ministry and good news for the church.”

**Kevin and Trisha DeYoung**, Senior Pastor, University Reformed Church, East Lansing, Michigan. Kevin and Trisha have been married for twelve years and have six children.

“Pastor’s wives are deep in the trenches of gospel work. We need biblical truths that meet us there and help us joyfully persevere. Gloria Furman has given us a rich, gospel-saturated resource, drawing our eyes away from any prescribed role and setting them on the one who really does the work.”

**Christine Hoover**, author, *The Church Planting Wife* and *From Good to Grace*

“Make no mistake: your role as a pastor’s wife is essential. Gloria reminds us all to first and foremost drink deeply from the living water of Jesus as we endeavor to humbly fulfill our calling to love our husbands and the body of Christ to whom we have been called.”

**Jennifer Carter**, wife of Matt Carter, Pastor of Preaching, Austin Stone Community Church, Austin, Texas

“Gloria Furman has given the church a much-needed gift by addressing a group that is often neglected—the wives of pastors. With the power of the gospel, the clarity of Scripture, and personal insight, Gloria helps pastor’s wives to first draw near to Jesus as their greatest need and satisfaction, then to love and support their husbands, and finally to find a healthy place in the local church.”

**Joe and Jen Thorn**, author, *Experiencing the Trinity* and *Note to Self*; Lead Pastor, Redeemer Fellowship, St. Charles, Illinois; and his wife, Jen, blogger, [jenthorn.com](http://jenthorn.com)

"This book reminded me that when I'm weary, Christ's strength sustains me; when I'm tempted to cave in to expectations, I'm free to love and please Christ above all. Whether you're a pastor's wife or a military wife or a door sweeper's wife, this book will encourage you to plumb the riches of God's grace to you in Christ."

**Kristie Anyabwile**, wife of Thabiti Anyabwile, Assistant Pastor for Church Planting, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC; mom of three; discipler of women

"Minister's wives lead unique lives with a unique set of challenges. Gloria does a beautiful job of reminding us that our identity is in Christ and his redemptive blood, not in the way we serve or how much we do for Christ. I felt encouraged and spurred on in my walk with the Lord to look upward to Christ and not at my outward circumstances. This is a very helpful book for minister's wives anywhere at any stage of life."

**Heather Platt**, wife of David Platt, President, International Mission Board; author, *Radical*

"The pastor's wife bears unusual responsibility. Though the Bible is completely silent about her role, churches tend to load her with unfair and unrealistic expectation. Gloria Furman brings both sense and hope, showing from the Bible what God does and does not expect from her. And because she looks constantly to the Bible, this is a book that transcends both time and culture. I happily commend this book to pastors, their wives, and their churches."

**Tim Challies**, author, *The Next Story*; blogger, *Challies.com*

"Gloria Furman gives practical and godly advice to those who are already serving as pastors' wives as well as those who are just starting out. Many pastors' wives feel the pressure to be someone they are not, wanting to be liked by everyone, or struggling with the juggle of family life and service. Gloria draws us to Scripture and back to our first love. *The Pastor's Wife* will help you avoid pitfalls and inspire you to stay close to Jesus and to find your strength in him. It reminded me of all I value about being a pastor's wife."

**Carrie Vibert**, wife of Simon Vibert, Vice Principal and Director, The School of Preaching at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford

## The Pastor's Wife

**Other Crossway books by Gloria Furman**

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GLORIA FURMAN



*Strengthened by Grace for  
a Life of Love*

**☐☐ CROSSWAY**

WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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

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To Carolyn Wellons,  
who freely shares decades of  
grace-wrought wisdom with  
hundreds of pastors' wives,  
pointing them to the infinite love  
of our Chief Shepherd





# Contents

Preface	11
Acknowledgments	15
Introduction	17

## PART 1

### **Loving the Chief Shepherd**

1	“But You’re the Pastor’s Wife”	25
2	On Inheriting a Kingdom of Idols and Expectations	39
3	Stay Close to Your Shepherd, Little Sheep	52

## PART 2

### **Loving an Under-Shepherd**

4	On Doing Him Good (and Not Harm)	67
5	Undergirding the Overseer	80
6	So, You Married the Man Who Marries People	96

PART 3

**Loving the Bride of Christ**

7	What on Earth Is the Church?	107
8	Gifted to Give What God Has Given	119
9	Weakness Finders and Christ's Sufficient Strength for Service	131
	Conclusion: Here Comes the Bridegroom!	144
	Notes	149
	General Index	151
	Scripture Index	153

## Preface

You need to know that I am writing a book to ministry wives not from a position of having “been there, done that” after decades of faithful service. I’m not standing at the end of the road looking back. I am, rather, in the middle of it all. My husband and I were married three weeks after he started seminary, and we have been in full-time ministry together ever since. That was about thirteen years ago. So this is not a memoir in which I offer you my personal wisdom. That is my “dis-claimer.” My “claimer,” then, is what I do have and hope to share with you. Namely, I feel an acute sensibility of our need for God’s grace to press on in ministry and a conviction that nothing but the blood of Jesus is all our hope and peace.

I’m finishing up this draft after two months of overwhelming ministry that’s been riddled with valleys and peaks. We had our annual Easter sunrise service on the shore of the Arabian Gulf, and my heart soared as we watched the sun rise over our city. We sang about our risen and conquering Savior. In that sea we baptized ten people

from five different countries, knowing that on the other side of that body of water we have brothers and sisters suffering and in prison because of their faith.

The next day I went to the grocery store where several of our friends work as cashiers. The women were distraught as they told me that my Nepalese friend Sumita had literally dropped dead in front of them the night before, seizing and vomiting blood. She was twenty years old and died apart from Christ. Shaken, I crossed the street with my groceries, and my preschool son repeatedly asked me, "Is Sumita with Jesus? Where is she?" Later that week it came to light that some false teaching has been threatening the faith of some of our church members, and the elders have spent many late nights talking and praying about what to do. The next week we discovered that a first-grade girl we know had been watching Internet pornography and was telling her classmates at school about what she had discovered. Then we received news that three doctors who had worshiped together with us on Good Friday had been shot and killed in a nearby country, martyred for their faith in Christ and for the good works they had done in his name. They had worshiped the Lamb by faith a week before, and now they see him face-to-face. The week that followed brought news that yet another friend from the grocery store had died suddenly, apart from Christ. Soon afterward my husband and I counseled a brokenhearted ministry couple who were suffering from the aftermath

of her being raped and extorted for money. This type of counseling may seem like a once-in-a-ministry occasion to most, but, sadly, to some ministers it is common. The pervasiveness of our sin can even deeply wound those who are married to men in ministry.<sup>1</sup> Who is sufficient for these things (2 Cor. 2:16)?

You may read some humorous accounts in this book, but I assure you, I do not believe that ministry by the Word through the Spirit is a joke. What I aim to do here is help lift your gaze to see the supernatural nature in what we are doing as we serve alongside our husbands in ministry. We need courage, strength, faithfulness, humility, and joy. We need to see Christ as our sufficient Savior. We need childlike faith to serve in ministry alongside our husbands—faith that God is glad to give us. The life of Christ in us is our empowering, equipping, unleashing energy for personal holiness and service in God’s kingdom. It is his strength that gives us what we need in order to nurture life in the face of death and through a million deaths-to-self each day. We need to remember that even the little blueberry-sized fruits produced by the Holy Spirit through Christ’s people are part and parcel of his kingdom, where his will is done. Our anchor must be cast on Christ, and our foundation must be his Word, because there’s no way we can love our Chief Shepherd, and the under-shepherd we are married to, and the bride we have been united to (Christ’s people, the church) unless we have first seen how

Jesus loves us and gives us everything we need for life and godliness. We learn of Christ's love foremost in the sufficient, authoritative, understandable Word of God, and that's why the text of the Bible is our focus.

There's no way a finite heart can hold all the things we face in life and ministry, but Christ can, he does, and he will. Expectations of the minister's wife swirl all around us. The joy available to us is resplendent and everywhere. The needs press in on us from every side. The grief and horror we experience because of our sin is appalling and replete. Are you burdened not only by the needs of others in your church but by your own as well? I want to show you in this book that Jesus will carry those burdens too (Isa. 40:11; 41:10).

No matter how old you are or however long you've been married or served in ministry, I think we can all humbly agree that we have a need for endurance to live kingdom-oriented lives in this dark and fallen place (Heb. 10:36). The endurance we seek is no grim drudgery but a glad dependence on Jesus for a life of love strengthened by grace. That's what I hope you find in the pages of this little book.

## Acknowledgments

Geometry is best done in community. Yes, geometry. But isn't this a book about the gospel, the church, and being married to a man who works in ministry? Certainly. Paul prayed that together "with all the saints," we would have strength to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love (Eph. 3:17-18). We need each other in order to have the strength to stay focused on and dwell deeply in this kind of "geometry." I'm an undeserving recipient of the grace of such a community.

I'm thankful for the many ministry wives who helped me work through the content of this book. In these pages you'll notice the influence and wisdom particularly of these godly women: *Megan Hill, Melanie Yong, Bev Berrus, and Jen Thorn*. I'm grateful for your careful comments, discerning questions, and enthusiastic encouragement for this book. I pray that every ministry wife might know the strengthening love of Christian sisters like you!

Thank you, everyone at Crossway, for taking such great joy and care in publishing books for the good of the church.



## Acknowledgments

Though I'll never know exactly how much work has gone into putting this resource together, I'm thankful for all the thousands of tasks that you did so cheerfully as unto the Lord. Special thanks go to *Justin Taylor, Lydia Brownback, Josh Dennis, Angie Cheatham, Amy Kruis, Matt Tully, and Janni Firestone.*

And on behalf of ministry wives everywhere (if I may be so bold)—to *the countless, unnamed ministry wives who suffer loss for the sake of the gospel*—thank you. We remember our sisters whose husbands are in prison, or are in prison themselves, as though we were in prison with you. We remember you who are mistreated, since we also are in the body. You have gone to Christ outside the camp and borne the reproach that he endured. Your faith reminds us that we have no lasting city here. And when we forget or flag in our zeal, your commitment to keep trusting in our unshakable God strengthens our resolve as well. By grace through faith we will share sweet fellowship together in the city that is to come.

And thank you to *my husband, Dave*, who shepherds others in the way of Christ by his strength and for his glory.

# Introduction

“*There you are,*” a woman whispered in my ear as she grabbed my elbow during a church gathering. “I’ve been looking *everywhere* for you!”

Startled, I braced myself. You never know what a statement like that could mean, especially at a church gathering. Did I leave the trunk of my car open (again)? Did one of my kids have an accident involving bodily fluids? Did my husband need my help? The woman held onto my hand, leading me from the back of the meeting room, where I was standing, into the lobby area. Was someone critically in need of prayer? Was a baby being born in the bathroom? Did someone leave a pumpkin latte out here with my name on it?

Instead of revealing any of those urgent situations, my friend pointed to the ceiling. “Look, see? The air-conditioning isn’t cold. You have to get it fixed.” I breathed a sigh of relief. “Oh! The air-conditioner? I don’t know how to fix the air-conditioner. I barely know how to read a Celsius thermostat.” She thought about this for a second and laughed. “But you *are* the pastor’s wife.”

## Great and Fearful Expectations

Both my husband and I had wanted to minister overseas before we were married. My husband spent a summer in the Middle East and fell in love with the people, their culture, their language, and their food. Dave is constantly trying to come up with more ways to incorporate *shish tawook* into his diet. For my part, a few months after I began walking with God in college I read *Let the Nations Be Glad!* with some friends. If you've ever read this book by John Piper, then you know why I applied for a passport after finishing the first chapter.<sup>2</sup> I was excited to serve the Lord overseas and felt like I was ready to go yesterday. We began a five-year journey in seminary where both of us would earn degrees. We got married three weeks after beginning our first class in our first semester and took on multiple jobs to stay afloat. During breaks from classes we led numerous short-term overseas mission trips for college students. I was so excited to do ministry overseas and for my husband to be a church planter. It seemed especially sweet that we were given the opportunity to explore ministry opportunities abroad while we were still in seminary.

But despite my knowledge of how ministry was a privilege, there was one thing about all this that terrified me. I was certain that I would never be able to measure up to everyone's expectations. All over the world, wherever we traveled, it seemed that my fear of man was confirmed at every turn. "You know you have to homeschool if you go

abroad,” one missionary said. “You don’t have much time left to learn how to read music,” a pastor’s wife warned me. “What your husband really needs most is a full belly of home-cooked meals and a thrilling sex life to keep him going,” a book for ministry wives instructed. The churches we visited all over the world had so many varying ideas of what their pastor and his wife were to be about. Every time we came back from a whirlwind trip across the globe, my head would spin with the world of expectations—lead the women, step back and disciple others to lead the women; be attractive to please your husband, be demure and have a [literally] quiet voice; model godliness, model brokenness. Don’t embarrass yourself and your husband through your ignorance, immaturity, or inexperience in ministry. And by all means, do everything in your power to keep your husband and children as godly as possible so that he will not be disqualified from the ministry. (Note: salvation is from the Lord, *not* the pastor’s wife.)

I might have been too paralyzed to even pack my suitcase if I had taken all these ideas too seriously. Just thinking about expectations can make a minister’s wife want to throw in the dish towel at the first potluck.

### **Where Does the Minister’s Wife Fit In?**

Our husbands need so much support, from studying in seminary to chairing elder meetings to organizing details for the church budget. We see them engaging in relation-

ships with leaders in the community, visiting people in the hospital, praying on the phone with church members, sending e-mails to staff, and hunting for resources in the library. We're with them in the middle of much of this labor of love. It's easy to get caught up in the expectations and roles debate and leave it at that. But I think too many conversations regarding ministry wives are centered on who she is and what she ought to do, and we spend so little time talking about who Christ is and what he has done and will do. Discussions of our ideals and expectations are healthy and helpful insofar as they do not distract us from loving our Chief Shepherd, our husband, and the church whom Christ died to purchase for himself.

In case you don't have time to read the rest of this book I'll just put my cards on the table—I think wives of ministers need encouragement and refreshment in the Lord, and we find that hope and help in the gospel. This idea isn't new or scandalous, but with all the things clamoring for our attention I think we (!) could use an opportunity to recalibrate our perspective and set our gaze on eternal things. After all, why would we want to wade around in shallow puddles of man-made ideals when there is the incomprehensible ocean of the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge for us to dive into (Eph. 3:18–19)?

I can imagine that you might be thinking a variety of things as you read this, depending on your perspective of what a ministry wife should be. Perhaps something about

the idea of having this role shaped by others' expectations unsettles you. But maybe you can't think of any realistic alternatives. After all, everyone has expectations placed upon them—everyone. A good question we ought to ask is this: Where are these expectations coming from? Frankly speaking, there are no verses that outline the expectations of the formal office of ministry wife because there is no such office prescribed in the Bible. The Bible does assume that some pastors will be married, so there are qualifications that such men (if they are married) be “married to one wife.”<sup>3</sup> But there is no formal role for their wives detailed in Scripture. Despite the absence of this formal role in Scripture, many a ministry wife is viewed as a staff member, an honorary elder, and even a copastor. It's no wonder that ministry wives feel pressure and loneliness. I imagine that when most of us scan the landscape of ministry ahead, we are overwhelmed, and this is the predominant thought that comes to mind.

I have a lot of hopes for this book. I want to dig deep into what the Bible says about who we are, what ministry and the church are all about, and how God uses weak people to do his will on earth.

My prayer is that this book would be used to equip and encourage you. I realize that your time and energy are in high demand, so I want to honor that and drill down to the things that matter and let you draw out the implications for your unique life and ministry. I'm hoping that this resource

## *Introduction*

is refreshing, because the grace of God can give us a humility that smiles rather than sweats when it comes to talking about the work of pastoral ministry. Speaking of not sweating the personal stuff, I should go turn on the fan in my room. Our air-conditioner might be broken again.

PART 1

# Loving the Chief Shepherd





## “But You’re the Pastor’s Wife”

Who am I? Where am I? What am I? Am I supposed to be playing some sort of role? If so, where did I put that script? And who wrote the screenplay? When we’re not sure of these things, we can find ourselves improvising in ways that are less than satisfying (and even self-destructive). This chapter lays the foundation and framework for a discussion on identity by talking about who God is and who we are according to what the Bible says. Remembering that we are redeemed sinners who are loved by a holy God is a message we all need to be regularly reminded of. Our identity at the most basic and fundamental level is that we are “in Christ.”

## **Lost and Then Found in Him: on “Finding” That Our Identity Is in Christ**

You're probably familiar with the children's game hide-and-seek. One of my sons loves this game, but he can't stand the suspense of the hunt. He stands somewhere out in the open and calls, "Here I am. Come get me!" Sometimes I "lose" my glasses even though they're right there on my face and fumble around in the bathroom looking for them. It may be comical to see a child hide in plain sight or watch someone rifle through toiletries looking for something they haven't lost. But it's less than humorous to watch Christians forget that they are "in Christ" and live out of some warped identity. We wander around like poor, lost sheep, bleating that nobody loves us; all the while we are actually safe forever in the arms of our Savior.

What do we mean when we say we need to find our identity in Jesus? Is our identity lost? It's important to think about these commonly used terms to discover the underlying meanings of what we're talking about. Living in a cross-cultural context has taught me time and again that we cannot assume we are communicating clearly even when speaking our own language. Further, even among fellow followers of Christ we have need for ongoing clarification.

What thoughts enter your mind when someone asks you, "Who are you?" Where you live or your nationality is what most people are looking for when they ask this question. Naturally, there is a host of connections and ideas

that enter one’s mind when you hear a country’s name. For example, when one woman learned that I’m from the United States she said, “Ah, I know Americans. You are *Baywatch!*” What she saw on an internationally broadcast television show informed her view of my country and of me. This is an extreme (and extremely awkward) example, but I think we can all relate to this woman’s thought process when we think of identity. We automatically connect whatever we know of the whole to the individual and vice versa. The ending to that interaction is that I fumbled my way through an explanation of Peter’s introduction in his first letter “to those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Pet. 1:1). My citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20–21), so I am a Christian whose passport was issued by the United States government. I retain my cultural heritage, yet my primary identity is defined by God’s uniting me to Jesus through his death and resurrection.

So, what is your identity? By what or by whom do you define yourself? Are you the master of your identity? Is your identity “lost in plain sight”? To call yourself a Christian is to embrace the cross of Jesus Christ and everything it says about who God is and who you are. You are in Christ. The fact that Jesus, the sinless Son of God, allowed himself to be crucified on a cross like a criminal says a lot of things. The cross says that God is utterly holy, and we are utterly sinful. The cross says that God requires a blood sacrifice for sins

committed against him, and Jesus took this punishment in our place (Rom. 3:21–26). The cross says that God loves us in ways that we cannot comprehend (see Eph. 3:19). “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). The cross says that God has provided the righteous standing we need to dwell in his holy presence and not die. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). Because of what Christ did for us on the cross, he has destroyed every obstacle that prevented us from enjoying him forever. Because of the cross we are no longer slaves but sons, and if sons, then heirs through God (Gal. 4:7). We are no longer strangers and aliens but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Eph. 2:19). We are free in the most awe-filled, reverent, and joyful sense of the word. We apprehend these things by faith, which is a gift, so none of us can boast (Eph. 2:8–9).

Whenever we speak of our identity as being a woman, a wife, or a pastor’s wife, let us have in our minds *the* primary reference point of being “found in him” (Phil. 3:9). Every hat we wear or role we play must be viewed through this perspective. Like the “lost” glasses that were right there on my face, your identity is always found in him whether or not you are conscious of it. This is why we need to rehearse the gospel often, asking the Spirit to transform us and remind us of God’s truth (Rom. 12:2).

## God, Man, Christ, Response

The identity question is one that we like to answer using labels. Sometimes the labels we use get more and more descriptive. “I’m the wife of \_\_,” one woman says. Another may say, “I’m a mom.” Then we tack on our personal peculiarities: “I’m a mom whose children are educated in such a way”; “I’m a mom who eats this kind of food”; “I’m a wife whose husband’s role in the church is this”; “I’m a woman who treats her illnesses in this manner”; “I’m a mom whose child plays this game”; “I’m a woman who buys this brand of whatever”; et cetera. We like to think of ourselves in terms of what we consume, produce, or possess, or how we behave.

But being a Christian is neither a label nor an area of interest nor a matter of personal opinion. Being a Christian means that the most basic and fundamental thing about you has changed forever. No longer your own, you are now defined by *whose* you are. You were dead in your sins, and now you are alive to God. This reality of being in Christ is not something we conjure up in our imagination to quell our insecurities. Exactly how has it come about that we are now “found in him, not having a righteousness of [our] own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Phil. 3:9)? We must look to God’s authoritative Word and not to our subjective feelings about how our heart feels today.

We like to create our own standards, but even our contrived standards are benign. We say things like, “At least

I'm not \_\_\_\_\_, like So-and-so." Subjective, halfhearted, and sometimes blended with biblical ideals, our standards are mere comparisons to other people. But God's Word tells us that we are not autonomous. We are accountable to God, who created us. In Romans 1 we learn that "the wrath of God is [being] revealed from heaven" (v. 18). We owe our Creator complete allegiance and heartfelt worship, but these things we have reserved exclusively for ourselves to our eternal demise. "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened" (Rom. 1:21). We are all under sin (Rom. 3:9). We don't have to search too far back in our memory to recall an occasion when we honored ourself above God or disregarded his grace toward us. We have no excuses—we've all broken God's law and deserve judgment. Our contrived standards and human laws cannot compare to God's holiness, and his wrath is righteously directed against all wickedness.

Every mouth is stopped—the whole world accountable to God (Rom. 3:19). "But now . . ." But! Now! "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it" (Rom. 3:21). God himself provided a way for us to escape the just penalty for our sin and be counted righteous before him. This forgiveness and righteous standing have absolutely nothing to do with how high we can pull our-

selves up by our moral bootstraps. The bootstraps of self-righteousness are chains. This righteousness of God apart from the law is a gift of grace. It is only through trusting in the work of Christ’s sacrificial death that we can be “justified by his grace as a gift” (Rom. 3:24). How do we get this gift? What do we do with this news? We respond to this good news through faith and *believe*. “And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness” (Rom. 4:5).

As the wife of a man in ministry, you may be aware of the various expectations that people have of you. Your culture, family members, fellow church members, community, and certainly your husband have ideas about who you are to them and to others. Their ideas about who you are probably vary from person to person. Are you feeling overwhelmed? Be assured that the one whose so-called opinion matters most has *the* decisive word on your identity. When you hear of the expectations that others have of you, you are free to consider them in light of God’s truth. There is ultimately no threat to your personhood, dignity, or worth, because the God who created all things, including you, does not have debatable opinions. Who you are in Christ never changes and is not threatened. God is the one whose name is “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex. 3:14), and he says, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine” (Isa. 43:1). We could not have been given a more thrilling identity! Does someone have an expectation of



you that is true and noble and praiseworthy? You are free in Christ to walk in love toward those around you as you draw on his strength to serve. Does someone have an expectation of you that is not true, noble, or praiseworthy? You are free in Christ to walk in love toward those around you as you graciously decline. In either case there is no need for defensiveness, fear, anxiety, or insecurity but only for gracious rest because of our security in Christ.

### **Wake Up, Sleepyhead**

Even as we are God's beloved whom he loves with a steadfast, everlasting love (Ps. 103:17), this massive, weighty truth just doesn't thrill our hearts 24-7. Consider the vast number of lectures we have attended, the sermons we have heard preached, and the Bible studies we've completed. Even so, we grow bored and irritated when we hear someone speak of God's love for us. "I already know that," we sigh. "Yeah, but. . ."—our hearts are dissatisfied. But in saying this, we reveal that we have actually forgotten. "I already believed the gospel; can we move on?" We shrug off the reminders. And again, we reveal that we have forgotten. Even in the midst of solid preaching, regular opportunities for outreach, days on end of fellowship gatherings, and all variety of religious activity, we can get bored of worship, ministry, and communion with God.

I'm sure you've experienced a season in which you sit down to read your Bible and pray but you can't keep your

mind from wandering to all the other things you’d rather be doing. Lately I’ve been distracted by my hair (this is silly, I know). The air in our city changes from humid to arid quickly, and my hair doesn’t like that. When I’m sitting still and want to quiet my heart, I find that I’m actually thinking about how uncomfortable I am in my own skin and hair. My mind also wanders to profuse and multiplying thoughts about myself. “Everyone is so selfish. No one has time to think of me,” the ego complains. So I compensate for the attention deficit I feel and obsess over my plans, my feelings, and my stuff. I become the biggest thing in my mind, and my desires become the strongest tugs in my heart. Of course, this narcissistic disposition affects everyone around me. If I’m not happy, then nobody’s happy. In reflecting on these times, I can feel my conscience sting from conviction of sin.

Perhaps you feel the same shame or frustration about feeling bored with God’s love. If you hear the hissing accusations of Satan, who tells you that you’re a self-centered sinner, then remind the Devil that he may be well aware of your sin, but because of Jesus your heavenly Father has promised to forget them all (Ps. 103:12). “I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins” (Isa. 43:25). Praise God for his indwelling Holy Spirit, who is kind to lead us away from sin and into righteousness. What a grace to know that something is awry when God’s beautiful truth becomes blasé!

It's a gift to see the disparity between our affections for God and his utter worthiness, because then we see that God has not left us to ourselves but is reaching out to us in his kindness to repent of our sin. In these times we can see how ministry is an impetus to direct our affections to the Lord. Time and time again the women in our church have pointed me back to Christ as we walk together confessing this struggle to one another. I'm so thankful!

Lest we come to believe that the gospel and the resulting ministry of the gospel are about us, we need to behold our God. When we're being tugged in a navel-gazing direction, we need to behold our God. When we're anxious about the vision we had for our lives, we need to behold our God. When we're content with how life is going and feel little urgency about anything, much less spiritual matters, we need to behold our God! We need to have the eyes of our hearts enlightened so we may know the hope to which he's called us, our glorious inheritance, and the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us (Eph. 1:17-19). There is always more to life than what meets the physical eye. Every day and even every hour we need to wake up. In the short time it took you to read these few paragraphs, you are that many breaths closer to meeting the Lord face-to-face. We are careening toward our eternal destiny according to God's sovereign and good plans. "Besides this 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” (Rom. 13:11).

Do you use an alarm clock to wake up in the morning? I sometimes use the alarm on my mobile phone. There are dozens of options for the alarm sound! It’s important to pick the right sound, right? You don’t want to wake up to an obnoxious noise or miss the alarm because the sound is too soft to hear. What sort of thing will wake us up from our spiritual grogginess? We need to splash buckets of ice water on our sleepy souls when we’re tempted toward the despising, despairing, or degrading of God’s astonishing good news. “So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober” (1 Thess. 5:6). God’s sufficient Word peels back the façade we have drawn over the reality he has created. The reality check we need cannot be gained through “listening to our hearts” and telling ourselves who we are. Through God’s Word we gain an eternal perspective through which we can evaluate every heart twinge, relationship, and circumstance. Do you know a timeless, familiar Bible verse that speaks to this? “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105). What mercy from God that he would give us his illuminating Word and that it is always shining, regardless of whether we perceive it.

### **Just Keep Swimming**

Do you recall the way you felt as you walked down the aisle to stand by your husband at your wedding ceremony? The

church that my husband and I were married in had a very, very long aisle. It was nicknamed “the green mile” because of the green carpet. When they opened the back doors of the sanctuary, I could see the platform lit up way down the aisle at the front of the room. The glare of the lights and the distance made it so that I sort of had to take it by faith that everyone was in place and that Dave was standing there waiting for me. My father took my arm, and we started walking. At first I couldn’t see my groom clearly, and everyone’s gaze fixed on me made me feel nervous. But when we got closer and I locked eyes with Dave, he was all I could see. I remember feeling a swelling peace and joy fill my heart that crowded out my feelings of insecurity.

“Being married to a man in ministry means your life is in a fishbowl,” a pastor’s wife once told me, “because everyone is watching you.” No doubt, there are elements of a life of ministry that resemble her remark. And there are biblical exhortations regarding discipleship that suggest that the people whom you are leading ought to be able to watch your life (2 Thess. 3:7–9; 2 Tim. 3:10; Heb. 13:7). This fishbowl illustration has truthful elements in it, and it is certainly a good thing to know that one is accountable to walk in integrity because people are watching your life. There is a safety and assurance that our family experiences in knowing that we are cared for enough by our church body and elders not to be ignored when it comes to keeping watch over our souls. But I think sometimes the fishbowl

feeling can take a sinister tone—like your family is the fish in the tank and everyone else is a cat. They’re watching you, waiting for an opportunity to strike.

I remember feeling this way when we first moved to the region of the world where we now live. My husband and I and our daughter lived across the border in a small town in a neighboring country. Everything was new—language, food, geography, customs, and lifestyle. Each day that I stepped out of our gate and walked around the corner to my language class, I was aware of the eyes that were watching me. Some stared openly and didn’t look away when I noticed them. Others went out of their way to cross the street so they could cross paths with me and watch me walk to class. One time I entered a store and recognized the phrase spoken by the shopkeeper to another customer in their local dialect: “Look! There she is.” All this attention made me uneasy, and I began to feel a strong desire to withdraw and avoid leaving my home. So I talked about my feelings with an older woman who had lived there for years. She explained that my neighbors with their stares weren’t malicious but curious. “Why not let your light shine?” she encouraged me. This shifted my thinking, and I began to see multiple opportunities every day to speak to curious people about Jesus.

Sometimes we think of letting our light shine before others (Matt. 5:16) like it is a fireworks show. We need to keep the people ooh-ing and ahh-ing in new and surpris-

ing ways while we impress them with our astonishing godliness and perfections. But letting your light shine before others has an entirely different scope and aim. Our good deeds and upright conduct are not about showboating ourselves but about demonstrating that we have a better possession and a lasting one in heaven and that our Rescuer is both holy and forgiving.

God does not apologize to us for calling us to participate in his Great Commission, because it is an inestimable privilege. While we might imagine ourselves as the sole, lonely fish in the bowl, we can take comfort knowing that our church body is actually swimming with us. One of the reasons I love my diverse, multiethnic church is that we are united to one another in Christ—we are “we.” Though we come from all over the world, there is no “they” in the body of Christ. We are a body! My heart is comforted week after week in our corporate worship gatherings as I look around and think, “We’re together.” I’m not alone! Sister, even in the hard-to-reach places of this world where the loneliness is not imagined but very real, we can still take heart because of the gospel. The weariness we feel when we look at all the needs around us is replaced by an invigorating appreciation for Jesus’s performance on our behalf and his strength toward those who are weak. Grateful to God for grace, we pursue holiness and do our good works through his strength so that our Father in heaven gets the glory. We’re all swimming together by God’s grace alone.

# General Index

- accountability, 30, 36
- church, building the body of,  
112-14; eternal nature of,  
109-12; serving in, 123-30
- comparisons, 78, 97
- confidence, 71
- contentment, 34, 71
- courage, 13
- creation, 69-70
- cultural heritage, 27
- death, 12-13, 58
- Dever, Mark, 112
- discipleship, 36, 76-79, 129-30
- dissatisfaction, 32-36
- elder/pastor qualifications,  
82-95
- expectations, 20-21, 47-51,  
73-75
- faith, 13, 28, 31, 43, 51, 55, 60, 91,  
100, 135
- forgiveness, 30
- God, love of, 32-36, 52-57;  
mercy of, 133-34; as  
provider, 146-47; service  
in kingdom of, 13, 57-60,  
121-26, 133
- grace, 11, 47-49, 54, 59, 78,  
91-92, 103-4, 132, 138
- Great Commission, 38, 94, 129
- headship, 83-85
- helper, 69-72
- holiness, 13, 54, 58
- Holy Spirit, 56, 133-35
- hospitality, 101-3
- humility, 13, 22, 77, 84, 128
- ideals, 20
- idolatry, 40-45
- integrity, 36
- Jesus, body of, 38; finding our  
identity in, 26-32; free-  
dom in, 47-51; as high  
priest, 113-14; inheritance



## General Index

- in, 58–59; love of, 20, 60–63, 145–46
- joy, 13, 62
- judgment, 30
- labor pains, 60–63
- Lewis, C. S., 109
- “life in the fishbowl,” 36–38
- Lloyd-Jones, Martyn, 41
- loneliness, 21, 38
- marriage, 57, 72–73, 76, 83–85, 121, 149
- new heavens and new earth, 117
- people pleasing, 50
- perseverance, 91–95
- Piper, John, 93
- prayer, 93, 139–40
- pressure, 21
- reputation, 98–100
- righteousness, 28, 30–31, 144
- salvation, 19, 133
- sanctification, 57
- Scripture, qualifications of
  - wife, 21; sufficiency of, 35;
  - teaching and preaching of, 87–92
- seasonal ministry, 75
- self-righteousness, 31, 56
- Sibbes, Richard, 59
- sin, 30, 41–42
- spiritual battles, 93–94
- spiritual gifts, 123–30
- submission, 85–86
- temptations, 44
- weakness, 135–43
- weaknesses, 47
- wisdom, 100, 137, 141
- worship, 32, 43, 114–19

# Scripture Index

<i>Genesis</i>		56:4	71
1:26	124	56:11	71
2:18	69	73:26	143
3:5	41	78:1-7	129
12:1-3	117	86:11	48
		96:4	137
<i>Exodus</i>		103:12	33
3:14	31	103:17	32
18:14	71	118:6	71
20:3	41	119:89-91	58
33:20	134	119:105	35
		121:1-2	71
<i>Leviticus</i>		145:4	129
19:18	145		
		<i>Proverbs</i>	
<i>Deuteronomy</i>		1:7	44
6:1-9	129	21:9	86
33:26	72	21:19	86
		31	86
<i>Joshua</i>		31:12	79
1:5	71		
		<i>Song of Solomon</i>	
<i>Psalms</i>		6:4	150n13
16:11	63		
19:1-6	89	<i>Isaiah</i>	
23:6	54	40:11	14, 53

## Scripture Index

41:10	14	6:4	81
43:1	31	13:48	133
43:25	33	17:6	48
		18:10	134
<i>Ezekiel</i>			
34:12	53	<i>Romans</i>	
34:23-24	53	1:18	30
37:26-28	112	1:21	30, 42
		1:25	42
<i>Matthew</i>			
5:8	134	3:9	30
5:16	37, 134	3:10-11	44
19:6	104	3:19	30
22:36-40	43	3:21-26	28
25:34	51	3:24	31
25:46	133	3:25-26	133
28:18-20	95	4:5	31
		5:12-21	43
<i>Mark</i>			
10:45	103	8	61
		8:18	138
		8:22-23	60
<i>Luke</i>			
15:10	60	8:28-39	58
22:19	142	10:13-17	133
		11:36	132
<i>John</i>			
1:16	59	12:1	134
3:35	57	12:2	28
3:36	133	12:4-5	111
6:29	45	12:10	141
10:16	94, 134	13:11	35
10:28-29	53	15:7	141
13:34	141, 145	<i>1 Corinthians</i>	
15:9-14	145-46	1:29	142
15:11	129	1:30	100
<i>Acts</i>			
6:1-6	81	3:16-17	110
		3:21	59
		3:21-23	58
		4:7	132

6:19–20	110	4:11–13	112–13
10:24	133	4:12	81
13:12	134	4:15	110
15:10	125, 143	5:15–16	100
		5:20–23	83
<i>2 Corinthians</i>		<i>Philippians</i>	
2:16	13	1:12	136
5:21	28	2:13	63
9:6–9	102	3:9	28–29
9:8	125	3:20–21	27
11:28	81	<i>Colossians</i>	
12:1–10	136	1:16	57
12:9	51, 143	1:29	125
13:11	141	2:14–15	47
<i>Galatians</i>		3:16	100
4:4	53	3:23–24	49
4:7	28	4:5	100
5:13	141	<i>1 Thessalonians</i>	
6:2	142	5:6	35
6:10	134	<i>2 Thessalonians</i>	
<i>Ephesians</i>		1:11	100
1:1–6	91	3:7–9	36
1:3	139	<i>1 Timothy</i>	
1:17–19	34, 84	1:5	140
2:8–9	28	1:6	140
2:8–10	133	1:19	140
2:10	77, 102	3	73, 82
2:19	28	3:1	140
2:20–22	110	3:2	82, 87, 101,
3:13	137		149
3:17–18	15	3:4	83
3:18–19	20, 57	3:7	98–99
3:19	28		
4:10	99		
4:11	140		

## Scripture Index

3:16	100	13:5-6	71
4:16	140	13:7	36
6:11-12	51	13:14	117
6:17	78	13:17	140
<b>2 Timothy</b>		<b>James</b>	
1:8-10	54	1:5	100, 139
2:3	93	<b>1 Peter</b>	
2:4	93	1:1	27
2:8-9	93	1:4	50
2:10	93	1:8-9	50
3:10	36	2:5	113
4:1-2	90	2:5-6	110
4:8	140	4:10-11	124, 126
<b>Titus</b>		5:7	100
1	73, 82	<b>1 John</b>	
1:5-9	149	3:3	134
1:6	82	3:11	146
2	76-77	4:10	28
2:3-5	129	4:18	44, 50
2:4	76	<b>2 John</b>	
<b>Hebrews</b>		5	146
2:4	126	<b>Revelation</b>	
3:13	142	5:9	134
4:14	113	7:17	54
7:25	55	19:1-9	148
9:11	113	21:22-26	117
10:24-25	118-20	22:4	134
10:34	134	22:20	60
10:36	14, 77		
12:2	102		

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