

Ministers' Wives - Battling Bitterness

Written by Jennifer Mathewson

Some ministers and their families are swallowed by whales but most are nibbled to death by the minnows. Growing up in a pastor's home and now married to one, I know the humor of that statement is sometimes superceded by the truth of it.

In an overwhelming crisis or the daily pressures of ministry, a minister's wife may find herself swimming in a sea of anger and resentment that can lead to bitterness. Certainly we have been warned against bitterness in Hebrews 12:15, but how do we prevent it in the midst of ministry?

The prophet Jeremiah dealt with all the emotions that lead to bitterness. He expressed his thoughts in Jeremiah 20:7-18 through one of the bleakest, blackest poems in all of Scripture. Yet in the depths of his despair, we can learn much about guarding our hearts from the dangers of bitterness.

Lay out your hurts. Jeremiah did not keep his feelings to himself. He expressed them to the Lord and oddly enough the Lord was not repelled by Jeremiah's anger. God will not be repelled by our anger either. He is big enough to handle our toughest questions and our most heart wrenching accusations. Christ is our high priest and we can come boldly to His throne. He will meet us there with mercy even if we have come to Him in anger.

Lean on the Word. The Bible is truth. In times of distress we cannot lean on our emotions but must vigorously turn to truth. Jeremiah leans on the truth in verses 11- 13. He concludes these verses with, "Sing to the Lord! Give Praise to the Lord! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked!" These shining statements let us, and the prophet, know that God is still a good God who keeps His promises. We too can glean knowledge and hope from the truth of God's Word.

Love the Savior. Sometimes in ministry, it is hard to love people! After all, people are usually the source of our irritation. Jeremiah's focus had to be the Lord, not people. Likewise, in John 21, Jesus wants to hear about Peter's love for the Savior. He then tells Peter three times to feed the sheep but never tells Peter to love the sheep. Why? Because sheep can be difficult! If our service to Christ is motivated primarily by love for people we will wax and wane according to how

they treat us. If our service is out of love for Christ we will remain faithful and guarded from bitterness.

Look to the future. All of Jeremiah's utterances of hope are in future tense. He is looking ahead for better days and fulfilled promises. Thankfully, those days came! The apostle Paul says in Philippians 3:13, "Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead..." reminding us that because of Christ, the hurtful events of the past do not have any power over us. No matter what the circumstances of life and ministry have been, God gives a future and a hope! (Jeremiah 29:11)

Whether the whales are swallowing or the minnows nibbling, bitterness can never be an option for the minister's wife. If you and I will lay out our hurts, lean on the Word, love the Savior and look to the future, our hearts will be anchored to Christ no matter what is lurking in the ocean.

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