

✿ *Expressions of a Joyful Life* ✿

A Devotion Book for Women Married to Pastors
(written by women married to pastors)

Assembled by
Valerie K. Johnson



Pastors' Wives' Renewal

Encouraging One Another in Faith, Life, and Ministry

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Pastors' Wives' Renewal serves women married to pastors of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.



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✿ Foreword ✿

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints – the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth. Colossians 1:3-6

Ladies, I thank the Lord for you. I thank the Lord for all my sisters in Christ. I’ve learned that I am definitely a woman who needs friends. Time with my girlfriends helps me maintain balance and refreshes me. In stretches of life when I haven’t found time to connect with my girlfriends, I notice that I get depressed with the responsibilities that usually give me joy, and I am more easily frustrated. In our busy and hectic world, it’s often difficult to find time to even see a movie with a friend. We’re all busy. We have families, busy husbands, and personal responsibilities. We have jobs and sometimes ministries of our own. Yet we make time for the things that are important to us. I make time for my friends because I know what happens when I don’t.

So are you making time for your Best Friend? In my busy life, personal time with my Lord is often easy to push off or forget as a priority. Even amid preparing to lead a weekly women’s Bible study and writing a new presentation for an upcoming women’s retreat, it is so easy to miss out on the prayer and devotional time that builds me up. And what can I offer others when I’m running on empty? When I’m not in the Word and seeking the advice and comfort of my Best Friend, I’m more easily frustrated with the stresses of life. My perspective gets skewed. I lose focus on life, love, and ministry.

Dear friend, join me in some time with our Best Friend. Be encouraged by some amazing women, and allow the Spirit to uplift and refresh you!

Valerie Johnson

✿ Introduction ✿

This book is about sharing those joyful times and the lessons we've learned. It's about time with friends. And especially time with the Lord.

Join these women who are married to pastors as they share their experiences, the Scriptures that encourage them, and the insights they've gained. From women whose husbands are in their first years of ministry to those who have more than a few years as a pastor's wife, I have found rejuvenation in their words. May you find the same.

This book is designed not only as a personal devotional, but also as a discussion starter. We invite you to read this book with friends and fellow pastors' wives. If you're able to get together with a small group of women, we hope the "To Ponder" sections will make for some interesting study and discussions as a way to learn from each other and build one another up.

Housewives in Armor?

How We Daily Put On the Full Armor of God



Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Ephesians 6:13



Yes, it is true. Wives need armor. Housewives need armor. Working wives need armor. Moms need armor. But before we can discuss how to put on this armor, we must first know what this suit of armor looks like. The picture of David and Goliath comes to mind. Goliath had on a massive, heavy, seemingly all-protective suit of armor, and then there was David. He could have used Saul's grand suit of kingly armor, but chose not to. And yet David, the one who marched out without King Saul's armor and toward Goliath's mighty armor, had on the greatest suit of armor, invisible to all but his Lord and Savior. What was that armor? It was his faith in his Savior and God, his belief in his Lord's promises, and his trust that God was on his side and had the power over all things, even things as big and scary as a Goliath, fully clothed in a worldly suit of armor.

Are we in the same situation as David? Do we have a battle to go into? Do we have giants to fight? According to the verse preceding our text, we are and we do. Ephesians 6:12 says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." We daily have battles to fight. These battles are attacks against our faith in Jesus. These battles can be subtle attacks to wear down our consciences. Pictures on billboards, language on television, disrespect allowed in classrooms, gossip about a friend. Or these battles could be slightly less subtle—decision theology mentioned in a song we like; incorrect application of a Bible passage; a long, tiring day that keeps us from our devotion

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time. And then there are the blatant attacks on top of these other attacks. Evolution taught in schools and in magazines, modern philosophy that says all who are good are going to heaven, a new bestseller book about witchcraft. If we sit and think about it for awhile, the attacks are countless.

So like David, we have a battle to fight. And like David, it may look like an impossible task to undertake. How can we, mere sinful human beings, possibly stand up to so many attacks? Well, we can't. We need help. Soldiers don't go into battle unarmed. And they don't go into battle thinking, "We are not going to be able to do this." They go into battle after much training, much work, and having given up many things. They have prepared mentally and physically. They have the proper attitude and the proper gear. Where are we then going to get the proper attitude, the proper gear, the proper "armor" for our battles? From God alone. What is included in our list of armor? "Belt of truth." Truth is found in God's Word. "Breastplate of righteousness." This is a gift given to us through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. "Gospel of peace." This is found in God's Word. "Shield of faith." This also is a gift given to us by God. "Helmet of salvation." Again, a gift given by God. "Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." What do these have in common? This suit of armor is found in God's Word and in God's spiritual gifts to us.

Now, how do we put this on? How do you put on God's Word and God's spiritual gifts? The first step would be to ask God to help us put it on correctly. We do this by first asking the Holy Spirit to guide us. Then we must start our armor training. March up to your Bible and read it. Read it daily. Read it for a general knowledge of our salvation history, for a list of God's promises (and for how He has kept them and will keep them), for His condemnation of sinners, for His great kindness and patience and forgiveness. Then read your Bible for specific help in shining and mending your armor. Do you have a weakness in one area? Is there a weak spot in your armor? Find a Bible verse to encourage you or admonish you, and memorize it that day. Then take time to pray to your heavenly Father and ask Him for forgiveness and for help in facing the day's battles. Do not be discouraged with the battles that will come. Paul tells Timothy, "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of

Housewives in Armor?

power, of love and of self-discipline." March into battle prepared and confident in the Lord's power and in the Lord's promises.

To Ponder:

1. How fully "armored" are you currently? How can you today begin shining and mending your armor?

2. Read Colossians 3:15-17.
 - a. How does an attitude of peace help us in life's daily battles?

 - b. Where does that attitude come from? How is it different from the world's definition of peace?

3. Is it true that the more prepared you are for the battles, the more battles there seem to be? Why or why not?

4. Fighting daily battles doesn't sound like much fun. What should our attitude be in the face of this knowledge?

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*Dear Father who loves us as His dear children,
Thank You for giving us faith to believe in Your Son, Jesus. Thank You
for giving us Your Word as a guide to help us on our daily walk
through this life. Help us have the discipline and the desire to pick up
Your Word, Your love letter to us, and to read it daily. Thank You for
promising to be with us during all battles that we will face. Help us to
remember to turn to You first in our time of little and big battles.
Amen.*

The Joy Set Before Us



May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13



Are you joyful? Do you find joy in the details of daily life? Do you experience joy when your husband needs to go to another meeting or visit? Does the prospect of tomorrow's schedule bring joy to your heart? Do you feel joy in serving? Hopefully, joy finds you often. But if not...what do you do? The Apostle Paul instructs us in Romans 12:12 to "be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." Joy is a pleasure, a feeling of delight and happiness. And frankly, there are many days that I'm just not all that joyful. Unrealistic expectations from others, stresses of life, and often feeling like there's no one to help, at home and at church, can sap the joy right out of me. Not to mention that fact that our feelings are so fickle. Our feelings are influenced by the sun and weather, by those around us, by chemicals in our brain, and by so many other things we don't have control over. I try to be patient. I try to sort out why I'm "down." Prayer often helps me find peace and comfort. But joy can still be elusive.

That's when I turn to Nehemiah. Are you familiar with the story? The Israelites had been in captivity in Babylon for many years. And at this time, Nehemiah was allowed to lead any Israelites who wanted to return back to Jerusalem, to the land the Lord had given them. Through many setbacks and much opposition, Nehemiah led the people in rebuilding the wall surrounding the city and the Temple. Then...

All the people assembled...in the square before the Water Gate.

They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel.

So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women

The Joy Set Before Us

and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Nehemiah 8:1-10 (excerpts)

How do you feel joy when you're weeping? As the Israelites listened to the Book of the Law, they were confronted with their sins. They were reminded of all the ways they had turned their backs on the God of their fathers. They were brought face to face with their shortcomings. And what can we expect when we come before God with all our sins? His wrath.

Yet Nehemiah tells them to celebrate. He says this day is sacred. Nehemiah tells the Israelites, "The joy of the LORD is your strength." They were children of the covenant. They had the promise of the Savior. Nehemiah says, "Don't miss the good news! Take refuge and comfort in God's joy!" When we go before the Lord, we no longer have to face His wrath. What do we find when we go before the Lord with our sins? We find forgiveness. We feel His face shining on us! We find His joy! We may not always have those feelings of joy in this life. Our husband's ministry can impact us in negative ways sometimes. Our commitments to serve and the responsibilities we have can sap our energy and happiness at times. We can feel offended, hurt, and misused. Focusing only on ourselves can do that. When Ezra was reading the Book of the Law, the Israelites were only looking at themselves. They were focusing on their sins and what they had done, and it made them mourn. No joy there.

But there's more to see! Gaze at the Good News! Look at the Lord's love! See our Savior's sacrifice! Everything's been

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done FOR us! So let us shift our focus.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12:2-3

It was Christ's joy to endure the cross and scorn its shame. Christ's joy. Can you imagine feeling joyful about going to the cross? I have a difficult time wrapping my head around this one. Christ's joy. What greater love is there? He not only went to the cross for us, but He found joy in His sacrifice and His love. There's where we find our joy! We find our joy in the fact that it was Christ's joy to commit to this amazing act of love. What a reason to celebrate!

Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them. Nehemiah 8:12

It's a joy we can't help but share. The people celebrated and they also "sent portions of food" to those less fortunate, sharing their joy. It's the Lord's joy, not ours, that we need to be sharing. The joy of the Gospel promise. The joy of having a Savior who has given His life for us so that we may experience the eternal joys of heaven.

So, don't worry if you don't "feel" joy every day. If some Sundays you aren't the most elated about setting up for communion or playing the organ. Some days that smile may feel plastered on. These are the days you can remember that your strength is in the Lord's joy. And the Lord's joy is contagious. Whether we are ministering to our husbands, our families, our friends, our congregations, or complete strangers, let the Lord's joy burst forth. Be elated by the gift He has given. Find happiness in our future of eternal life with Him. And help others rejoice in God's joy!

The joy of the Lord is our strength in our daily lives.

The joy of the Lord is our strength in our personal endeavors and commitments.

The joy of the Lord is our strength in loving those our husbands serve.

The joy of the Lord is our strength in serving Him.

To Ponder:

1. What is the difference between the world's definition of joy and the biblical definition of joy? Is it more important what we feel toward God or what He feels for us?

Read Isaiah 35 - The Joy of the Redeemed. (*Isaiah 34:16 introduces the chapter.*)

2. Read Hebrews 13:15-17. *Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*
 - Where is God's joy in this passage? What is God's joy?
 - What does this mean for our Christian lives? How does this apply to being joyful in ministry – our ministry and our husband's ministry?
3. What are your joyful ways of serving the Lord?
4. We might compare ourselves to Ruth. Read Ruth 2:11-12. What level of commitment does Ruth possess? Where was Ruth's joy at various points in her life?

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5. Lucy is an example of a pastor's wife who is unhappy in the ministry. She resented the phone calls at mealtimes. She had no interest in attending Ladies' Aid or being involved in congregational activities. She wanted to live her life her way, and living in a parsonage next to the church put a crimp in that plan. She was unhappy and disillusioned. She had no joy.

Discuss Lucy and her problems. Have you ever felt as she did? What did you do about it?

How do you help Lucy find "joy in the ministry": her husband's and her personal ministry?



Lord of joy,

In amazement and awe, we thank You for finding joy in us. The sacrifice of love that brought us to You is truly something for us to be grateful for. But the fact that now You are pleased with our lives and actions, that in Your eyes we are blameless and pure and holy, gives us great joy as well. Please send Your Holy Spirit to remind us of Your joy regularly. And create in us the love and desire to share that joyful news with everyone around us, through our actions, our words, and our service. May we find joy in the everyday tasks You have set before us as well as the trials and temptations that are sent our way. Lord, also bless us with the feeling of joy that lifts our spirits and shines forth so brightly as we place our hope in You. In Your name we pray. Amen.

✿ Closing ✿

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:12-17