

in our shoes



real life issues
for Ministers' Wives
by Ministers' Wives

Rachel Lovingood • Jennifer Landrith

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The Authors

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Rachel Lovingood (left) has a degree in journalism from Louisiana Tech University. She is married to Jeff and mother of Trevor, Kelsey, and Riley. They currently serve alongside their good friends the Landriths at Long Hollow Baptist Church.

Introduction

Have you ever heard the old saying, “Don’t judge me until you’ve walked a mile in my shoes”? This quip explains, perhaps more accurately than anything else, the unique challenges faced by those married to ministers. Though life in ministry ideally should be a positive and exciting experience, it often gets a bad rap. Serving alongside a husband committed to church service is no small task. It takes courage, adaptability, and a heart centered on pleasing God and loving people—even when some of those people aren’t so lovable.

As ministry wives we’ve found few resources to help us deal with the specific and unusual situations we encounter. That’s why we desire to provide a Bible study that encourages and equips fellow ministry wives as they draw closer in their relationships with the Lord. We’ve designed this study to help you see the blessings and influence that are uniquely yours because of the call that God has placed on you. We hope that as you find opportunity to connect with other ministry wives, you will find encouragement for your own journey.

As you read, know that we do walk in shoes similar to yours. We are friends who’ve been ministers’ wives for over 40 combined years. We grew up in the same youth group, married best friends, and currently serve alongside each other at Long Hollow Baptist Church in

Hendersonville, Tennessee. Although our lives share many similarities, our journeys to this point differ.

I (Rachel) am married to Jeff, and we have enjoyed the privilege of ministering to teenagers for over 20 years. He has served as student minister at many different churches of various sizes and demographics. Through the years and the moves across country, I've dealt with lots of transitions and worked with different staff situations. While raising three children and freelance writing for various publications, I still try to stay connected and very involved with our church's youth as well as its Women's Ministry.

I (Jennifer) am married to David and we, too, have served for over 20 years while rearing three children. I know what it's like to be the only staff wife as well as being a part of a large group of staff wives. Through the years I've felt the pressures of supporting a husband who's pastored churches of 100 as well as a church of over 4,000. I have served in ministries of the church from preschool to students and enjoy involvement in those as well as Women's Ministry.

As your friends on this journey, we hope to address many of the situations facing you and your life in ministry. Know that while our study is not all-inclusive, the topics we will address in each chapter are chosen with you in mind.

How to Use This Study

This book is divided into eight chapters that can be completed for personal enrichment or as a guide to build discussions and interactions with a group of ministers' wives (see Leader Guide). You'll also find a section called Hot Topics which addresses real-life questions from ministers' wives across the country. Helpful Hints are also provided at the back of the book. This section is full of valuable information on everything from buying deacon gifts to helpful cooking hints that will help you prepare for unexpected company. You may wish to do one section a day, one a week, or even one a month. The material is flexible; make it work for you.

Remember, too, that we can often learn from talking with others who share situations similar to our own. Consider connecting with other ministry wives in one of the following ways:

- Host a monthly party for the staff wives at your church. Use this material to build and strengthen the team. Choose to sit down and really get to know one another. You'll learn to continually encourage one another on a deeper level.
- Plan a denominational or associational dinner. Find other wives at sister churches in your area who could benefit from this project. Select highlights from the content and find fun ways to share it with them during a relaxing evening of food and fellowship.
- Form an online community. Use the study as a springboard for thought to connect with others—regardless of location—in a safe and confidential environment. Share what you learn from this study. Ask for tips and offer support.
- Create a book club for ministers' wives. Get together with other ministry wives and chat at a coffee shop or take turns meeting at each others' homes. Use this book as your first discussion piece as you talk about a different chapter each meeting. Then, if the group wants to continue, find other books on relevant topics.
- Hold a community-wide, interdenominational picnic or tea. Use this event as a tool to bridge the denominational boundaries in your community and collect information on ladies interested in doing the study. Find a time to meet and plan a format that works for the group.
- Use for gifts and outreach. Take copies of this study along on mission trips to bless the missionaries with whom you serve. Use it as a gift for wives headed into ministry.
- Use as a reference tool. Keep this book on hand and use it to remind other women in ministry that they are not alone. You may also choose to revisit different topics as needed.

Our prayer for you as you complete this study is summarized by Ephesians 1:17-19. We desire that as you get to know God better through this book that you'll lean on the hope to which He has called you, knowing the inheritance that accompanies His calling and realizing that His incomparable power is at work in your life. May your life overflow with all the goodness the Lord has planned for you!

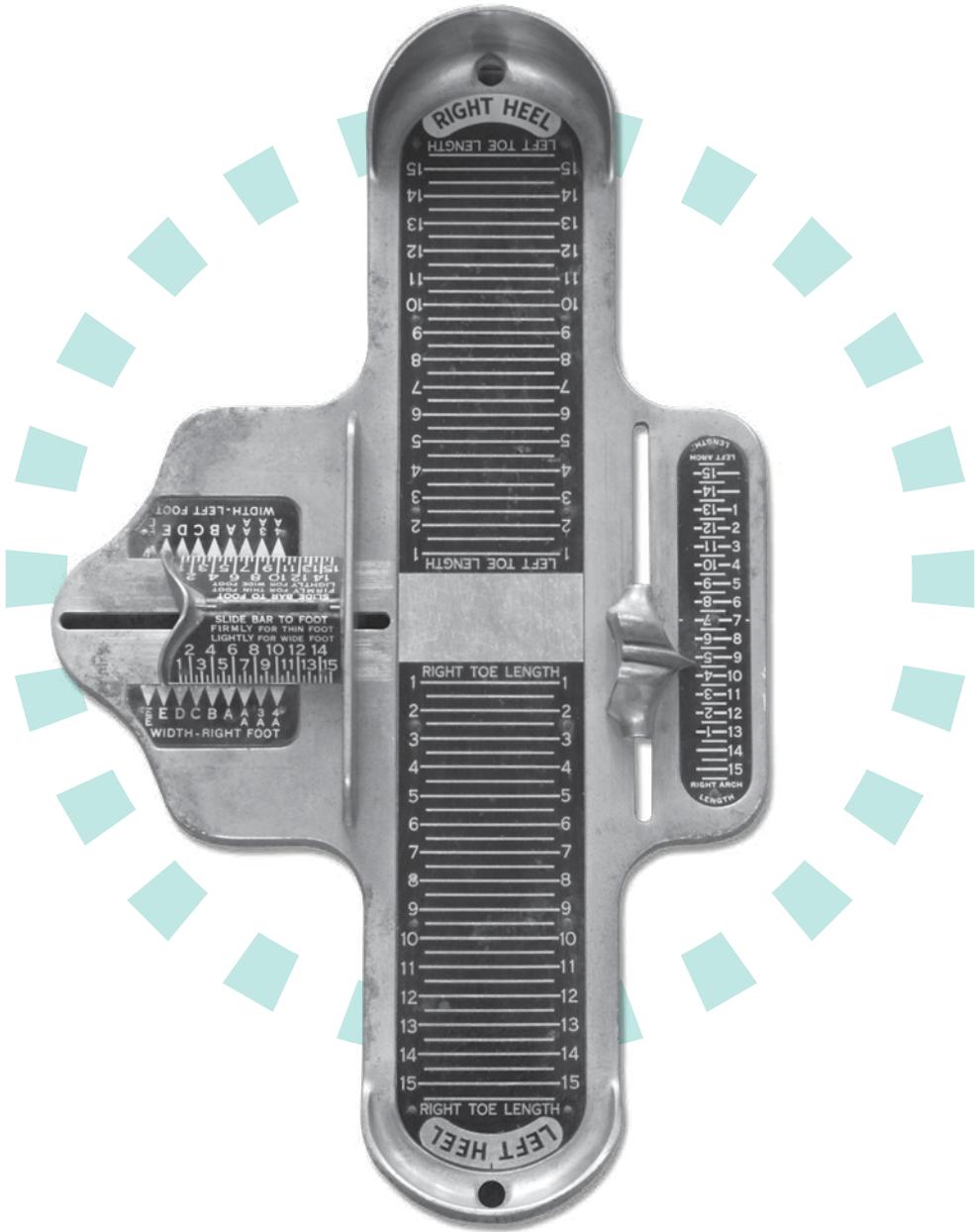
Blessings!

Jennifer Landrith

Rachel Lovingsood

chapter1

if the shoe fits ...





If you love shoes so much that the term “shoe addict” applies to you, you know the frustration that comes when a friend, who is also an ultimate shopper, shows off a new pair of cute shoes and insists that you try them on. With a tentative smile you give her a nod, and so begins the struggle of trying to stuff your size 9 foot into her size 8 heel. Frustration and pain soon result, reminding you that no matter how stylish the footwear, nothing causes discomfort more than shoes that don’t fit.

Sometimes we work so hard to make something that isn’t right for us “fit.” Jeans. Hairstyles. Shoes. But in reality, one style or size rarely fits all. This is particularly true of Bible studies and books geared toward all believers. While truth and great ideas can come from these studies, it’s difficult to find one that really addresses the specific concerns of wives in ministry. Nothing beats that feeling of slipping your foot into the softest leather shoe that is just your size. Our hope is that this study will prove a perfect fit for you.

So, where’s the best place to start a Bible study for ministry wives? Well, since we come from diverse backgrounds and situations, it’s imperative that we focus on what we have in common. Our greatest common denominator is ministry; therefore, it makes sense to start with how we got here.

Let’s begin with your calling. Don’t stop reading just because you aren’t crazy about that term. Remember, the significance of the word is often overlooked because we tend to think about callings in terms of how our husbands decided on their particular jobs, or we think that receiving a calling means receiving a heavenly summons to a specific church or overseas location. The word *calling* applies to all believers, but for the purpose of this chapter we want to focus on the personal, unique calling that wives in ministry need to understand and embrace.



MISSTEP:

If you started this chapter and are tempted to skip through, please be careful not to underestimate the importance of routinely evaluating and confirming your calling. Ask the Lord to open your heart and mind to anything He has to say to you.

The Holman Bible Dictionary defines a *calling* as an “invitation, summons, commission, or naming.” In our ministry roles, we’ll face some very tough times; you may already have experienced some. That’s why we as ministers’ wives need to recognize and accept God’s call on our lives. By remembering the call God has placed on you, you’ll find strength to stand when difficulties come.

Which of the following responses best describe your initial answer to God's calling on your life?

- I'm sorry. I think You have the wrong number.
- So glad You called; perfect timing!
- Can I get back with You when I'm not so busy?
- Good to hear from You! What do You want me to do?



Read 2 Peter 1:10-11. What does Peter advise you to do about your call?

What do you think he means?

These questions will receive special attention during group time.

When Peter admonished believers to “make their calling sure,” he wanted them to confirm in their own hearts just what the Lord had called them to do. How might confirming your call impact your life?

How might it impact your ministry?

Your relationship with your spouse?

If you confirm your calling to serve alongside your spouse here on earth and respond to God's invitation, accepting all He has planned for you, you get the promise of not stumbling (Jude 24). You also get the bonus of a rich welcome into the kingdom of heaven. Think of Paul's assurance in terms of buying a season ticket to one theme park and getting entrance to another. Here in Tennessee when you purchase a special ticket for Dollywood you automatically receive admission to Splash Country. It's a great two-for-one deal.

Making your calling sure is the ultimate two-for-one deal. Amazingly, this gift comes free to all who accept it. Now don't get confused. We aren't talking about salvation here. Instead, we want to focus on the additional calling you receive after choosing to accept Christ as Savior. From this point on in our study, we'll assume you are a follower of Jesus Christ. We realize, however, that not everyone in ministry is saved. Only those who believe in their hearts that Jesus is Lord, confess their sins to Him, and ask His forgiveness belong to God's family and will one day enter heaven. You must first answer God's call to salvation before focusing on God's call on the rest of your life.

Although most ministry wives would agree that some type of divine calling on their lives brought them to this point, they often define it with an adjective placed in front of the word "calling" rather than trying to understand what their callings mean on a personal level. The majority of women we've encountered identify with one of these four descriptions of their calling.

1. A SPECIFIC calling.

Women who connect with this description feel a clear, distinct call to ministry. Some knew they would marry ministers and prepared for that. Some began ministry and then married into ministry, but they all knew that ministry was their calling.

2. A GENERAL calling.

These ladies felt called to serve the Lord and were willing to do so, but they didn't necessarily know the exact direction it would take them. Perhaps they felt called to work with the homeless or maybe even overseas and now serve alongside their husbands in various ministries.

3. An UNEXPECTED calling.

Wives in this category felt surprised by the call to ministry. They may have married accountants who became business pastors or teachers who became youth leaders. While these wives hadn't planned on being in ministry, they accept their new positions willingly.

4. An IMPERSONAL calling.

Women who identify with this description see ministry as their husband's job—an impersonal call that doesn't apply to them. Often they resist the concept of partnering with their husbands in ministry.

If you strongly identified with one of these categories, put a star beside it.

Which of the statements best describes how you view your calling? It's possible that you had a hard time deciding. Remember that the word *calling* refers to an invitation, and God will not force you to accept His invitation or call. Let's have a little fun with this whole concept by comparing the four typical perceptions of God's call to ministry with four different parties to which we as ministry wives might receive invites.

Read the following party descriptions and put a heart beside the one that best relates to your situation.

A Formal Ball

This event is for those wives who excitedly received God's invitation to serve in ministry. Like gorgeously dressed Cinderellas heading to the palace, their response to God's call to serve is always a resounding "Yes, Lord." No matter what difficulties arise, they generally dance through the situation with glass slippers on their feet.

The challenge faced by ball attendees is that their own original callings from the Lord can override any new direction God may send, often leading them to struggle with letting God redirect and reshape their callings as He chooses. For example, we have talked with wives who originally felt called to missions and now find themselves married to children's pastors. Others find themselves home, raising the kids, when they had thought they would serve as the full-time staff person. These women sometimes feel discontented as life forces them to exchange their glass slippers for more useful footwear.

A Progressive Dinner

This get-together is similar to the formal ball in that attendees originally responded to God's invitation with excitement. They felt called to serve the Lord but didn't know exactly how that would play out in their lives. Many of these wives never actually felt called to ministry personally; but because they felt led to marry their husbands, they ended up partnering with them in ministry. Because these ladies trust that God is in charge of all things, they readily and willingly serve in various ways.

The challenge faced by those attending the progressive dinner is to continue to flexibly bend to God's direction even when life feels comfortable. These party-goers need encouragement to remain willing to try new things when tempted to stick with their broken-in favorites.

The Surprise Party

Wives at this party never expected to serve in the ministry. They thought they married businessmen and were then shocked by their husbands' announcements: "Honey, I've been called to preach, teach, or lead within the church." Often with little or no warning, they accepted a call they neither imagined or received formal training to prepare them for it. They're willing to serve but sometimes feel overwhelmed.

The challenge for attendees of this party is to overcome any feelings of insecurity or inadequacy and to adjust to the unexpected changes this calling brings. Though they may sometimes feel as if they've shown up for a formal masquerade in sweats and tennis shoes, they need to relax and let the Lord help them make the best of their current situation.

A Bachelor Party

Wives who received this invitation think of ministry as a bachelor party and feel as if they have no place. They often miss out on what it means to partner with their husbands in doing the work of the Lord. These wives feel the invitation came for their husbands and not for them personally. They look in on ministry from the outside while their husbands have the time of their lives inside. These wives resist becoming involved in ministry because they consider it their husbands' work and not their own.

Those in this group face a unique challenge. While their husbands can tell them about the exciting things happening in the ministry, they can't enjoy ministry as the personal blessing it is designed to be unless they choose to willingly participate.



What about the party description you selected relates to you?



FUN FLIPS:

Remember that it's a privilege to serve in ministry and you can start choosing today to see your calling as a blessing instead of a burden. Make a list of several things you like about your call as a ministry wife. Keep your list nearby and be encouraged when the going gets tough.

No matter which party description most appealed to you, you can benefit from taking a fresh look at God's calling on your life. Look at the blank invitation and take a few minutes to pray, asking God to reveal to you exactly what He has called you to do. Then complete the card by filling in your name and elaborating on your calling, listing the specific ministry steps God wants *you* to take.

You, _____,
are invited to join Almighty God,
Creator of the Universe,
in the work of His kingdom.

Your service is requested in the following ways ...

The favor of a reply is requested.

If this invitation feels impossible for you to complete with a list of concrete and, yes, enjoyable ways you can participate in ministry, please don't give up! Discouragement may endure for a moment, but God offers hope. Our husbands often remind people that it is easier to act your way into a feeling than to feel your way into an action. This powerful concept can apply to your attitude toward God's calling on your life.

List at least three things to which you are definitely called. For example,

I am called to be the wife of Jeff.

I am called to be the mom of Rachel, Sam and Josh.

I am called to teach 12th grade girls.

1. I am called to _____.

2. I am called to _____.

3. I am called to _____.

No matter how you answered this exercise, the point is clear. The Lord has important plans specifically designed to bless you and the lives of those around you.

Read these verses and write what you discover that relates to your calling as a minister's wife.

Galatians 5:13

1 Corinthians 1:9

1 Peter 2:9

**ACTION STEP:**

Discuss with your husband his specific call to ministry and how it relates to you. Share some of your insights from this chapter and talk about ways that living out your own ministry calling can support and encourage him in his ministry role.

As Christians and as ministers' wives we've been chosen, called to bring light, to serve, and to fellowship with Jesus! While you continually pray for God to give you a deeper sense of calling to ministry, focus on these things. God will use them to help you better understand and solidify your calling.

God doesn't want us confused about our callings. That's why it's important to recognize that our calling to serve as ministry wives is not static but dynamic; in other words, it may not always stay the same. For instance, a couple called to youth ministry may end up as senior pastor and a pastor and his wife may receive a new call into a chaplaincy or parachurch ministry. God is not the author of confusion, and He wants us to be at peace and content in the calling placed on us and our husbands. Daniel 2:28 says, "There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries" (HCSB). If your calling is a mystery at this point, don't despair; instead, ask God to bring clarification. In the meantime, continue serving in your usual manner until He makes the fullness of His direction for you more specific. Cling to the commands given to all believers: seek Him, know Him, and keep on loving your neighbors as yourself. As you do, you'll grow increasingly focused on Him and more in tune with the plans He has for you.

First Thessalonians 5:23-24 reminds us that God is faithful to help us live worthy of our calling. When we trust in Him, we'll receive the power to accomplish what He wants to do through us. When we finish with this world and hang up life's shoes, we'll find ourselves in the presence of the Lord. Our hope is that Jesus will one day say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have served me well and remained blameless and pure so that I could do what I purposed in your life" (Matthew 25:21, author's paraphrase). When you gratefully wear the different ministry shoes God gives you, making the most of every opportunity, then you will position yourself to hear those words!