

REDEMPTION

God often uses the dark places in our lives to help others.

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Sin can take us farther than we want to go, but God's restorative power can lead us right back to Him.

God often uses the dark places in our lives to help others. With that thought in mind, we share a story of God's power to restore a pastor's wife to Himself and to ministry.

MY LIFE AS A CHRISTIAN

Growing up in a Christian home as a pastor's daughter, I experienced truth and love. At a young age, [even] though I [had] accepted Christ as my Savior, I began a fleshly battle to win the praise of man. I found that something in me craved praise and affirmation. I served with the desire to be told that what I did was of value, and I saw love as something to be earned. I began to build my identity through acts of worth. The problem is [that] no one is perfect and no one can make everyone happy. This was a shaky, ever-changing foundation for finding worth.

LIES OF THE ENEMY

Nonetheless, I still loved God and wanted to serve Him as a pastor's wife—but my appetite for praise continued. This was ultimately a sin rooted in pride. Rather than offering the glory



Melissa Small (front row, far right) and Women's Ministry team members

to God, I wanted to find value in myself. This desire led me down a road of willingness to sacrifice my faithfulness and, over time, I convinced myself that there was a greater value in the praise of man than the love of God. It was tangible and instantly gratifying. I came to a place where I believed that the love of humans was greater than the love of God and even questioned whether or not His love was real. Ultimately, my service to God, His Church, and anything associated with His love was affected. In the context of the church, as a pastor's wife, the pressure to succeed and the opportunity to fail were too great. The hamster wheel of conditional-love-based thinking that I was on was too fast. The only way out was to jump off the wheel. To leave everything. To leave everyone.

DARK PLACES

God, in His grace and sovereignty, would not let

me go. He chased me. I was meant to be His. I was His child, bought with His blood, and He reminded me of that every day I ran from Him. It was during this time when I came to believe God's love was real, it was for me, and it was more filling than the love of any human. In our darkest places, the light of Jesus shines the brightest. That light was shown through His people too, as my husband and church family supported me and showed me compassion, grace, and patience. And in the end, God was victorious through the process.

GOD'S REDEMPITIVE POWER

Through a process of renewal and restoration, God began to reveal to me that He wanted others to know His love in a great way too. God showed me that love is not earned—it is freely given. It must be accepted and believed. God's power is real and true—it is saving grace to be embraced. And with

that revelation, He brought me to a Women's Ministry leadership retreat through the SBCV. The theme of the weekend was "Surrender." I felt I had already surrendered to God, but He spoke to me about the difference in being resigned and being surrendered. Being resigned is agreeing not to put

up a fight. Being surrendered is passionate proactivity to accomplish what is needed. Through godly women in my life and the Holy Spirit, God has provided forgiveness, freedom, and motivation to "press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14, NIV).

If you are a pastor's wife struggling with your identity and church expectations, you are not alone. You may not be discouraged to the point of quitting, but you may be overwhelmed by the expectations on your life. Do not be isolated in your struggle. Know that there are others who lose sight of the hope that we have at times—but that does not change the truth of the hope that is promised through Jesus Christ. We can find Him when we seek His strength.