

On being yoked

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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*Andrew Kort and Mihee Kim-Kort just wrote [Yoked](#), a wonderful book about being a clergy couple. To celebrate its arrival in the world, Mihee invited me--along with other clergy couples--to reflect on our own stories. Please watch [Mihee's blog](#) for more stories.*

Brian and I are at the Farmer's Market. I walk up to the vendors, and the wife says, "Oh! You must be Pastor Brian's wife."

I shake her hand and say, "Yes, I am Brian's wife. My name is Carol Howard Merritt." As she introduces me to her husband, I wonder if I should have added the "Reverend" to my name. I don't usually use the prefix, but should I have notified them that I'm a pastor too?

The husband begins to tell me how hard it is being a pastor. He knows, because his son serves a church.

I am patient for a while, but then his proxy complaints begin rubbing me the wrong way. Of course, I know the job is difficult, but I have just left an interim position and there is no other pastoral position in sight.

We moved here because my husband had an opportunity to start a church. Since he was the trailing spouse during our last three moves, I owed him. Plus, I have also been writing and speaking for eight years, and a good deal of my income is not bound to any particular geography. It made sense for me to relocate. I am very busy, but concentrating on those things means scheduling my calendar months in advance, which makes me a less likely pastoral candidate.

I really should be thankful for my place in this world. I *am* thankful. But I also love being a pastor and I can't help but indulge in a certain longing for my previous positions. I visit lectionary sites during the week, reading the passages, imagining what I would preach, if I could. Then I catch myself and quickly close the Internet,

feeling like a stalking ex-lover.

Finally, I break into the conversation. "I'm a pastor too. There are a lot of good things about the job."

"Oh, it *looks good*. From the outside, maybe. But believe me, it's tough." He starts in again, enumerating all the complaints we gripe about at clergy gatherings.

"I know. I'm a pastor too," I repeat. "I have served churches for 15 years. I had a lot of good moments during that time."

"But, you really don't understand..." and he's off to the races, letting me know that being a *pastor's wife* is different than being a *pastor*. He knows, because of his son.

My face is hot with anger now. I wish I could shrug him off. Who cares what he thinks? *I REALLY wish I didn't care*. But, I do. So for the third time, I tell him that I am a pastor. When he still doesn't get it, it would be comical, if I weren't upset. Then his wife interrupts him, puts her hand on his forearm until he looks at her face, and says slowly and patiently, "She is a pastor too."

He looks at me, blankly. "But you're just an associate, right?"

I practically run from the market. My cheeks feel like a pair of tomato pincushions, being pricked by a hundred needles. In my head, I list my accomplishments and achievements. I was a good student in seminary. I have written books. I speak at conferences. Important people have said nice things to me.

On one hand, people should listen to me, in spite of my resume. On the other hand, I feel like he just erased twenty-two years of preparation and service. Then, I begin to add up all the other slights. I know it's just my over-inflated ego. I know I should just be happy serving Jesus, but I want them to quit ignoring me. I want them to stop deferring all of their questions to my husband. I want them to know that my opinion matters too.

But most of all, *I REALLY wish I didn't care*.