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A Working Hypothesis in Good Times and Bad

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I met my husband when I was 33. We were introduced to each other through a long chain of friends and acquaintances. When I found out he was a doctor, my first instinct was not to become involved. I knew doctors gave so much of themselves to their job and I was not prepared to be that kind of wife. I was not willing to share my life with his pager and his patients. But, I took a chance and we started dating. I fell in love with the wonderful person he is and our adventure began when we got married in 2011.

After we had been dating for a few weeks, I found out that my then-boyfriend (and now-husband) would be leaving Canada, my native country, in order to pursue further medical training in the United States. I remember him asking me if I would be willing to follow him. My own response surprised me, "Without a shadow of a doubt, I will follow you." It was then that I realized that I wanted to be the wife he needed; the one that would support him. He made sure that I knew what to expect once we got married and moved. I felt prepared and ready for the challenge.

Yet *thinking* myself prepared was very different from actually going through the experience. Our first years of our marriage were extremely difficult. Not only were we learning about each other, but he was finishing his residency, studying for his board exam, and starting an intense fellowship. He was extremely busy at work and I was in charge of everyday household responsibilities. I was alone, away from my family and friends. I had to find ways of occupying my time in a city where I knew no one and a country where I could not work because I did not have a work permit. We had health issues. We suffered a miscarriage. We realized we were struggling with infertility.

Also, words cannot express the overwhelming stress of the financial difficulties we had in the first years of our marriage. I was powerless because I did not have a work permit. I kept checking the bank account, hoping that, miraculously, money would appear. It pained me to see him work so hard while all I could do was support him and be brave. But when I was alone, I worried, cried and prayed. At that point in our marriage, my husband certainly felt the weight of responsibility for not being able to provide for us. He was also pained and frustrated

at the delays in applying for the immigration status we needed so we could adopt a child.

At that time, it felt like my husband was very demanding. It felt like I needed to do everything for him. It was hard and frustrating because I felt more like a maid than a wife. It was hard not to be envious because I felt like his unacknowledged side-kick while he would get all the credit with his peers, our family and friends. It was easier for him because he had an engaging job, colleagues and friends. I was just a doctor's wife.

And yet, he was mindful of my struggles too. He encouraged me to find ways of filling up my time in a meaningful way. I volunteered as a volunteer coordinator at a pro-life organization and co-chaired a number of their events. I became my husband's research assistant. I trained as a FertilityCare Practitioner of the Creighton Model, a natural family planning system. I am pursuing a Masters in Theology. I began to meet people and create friendships, reestablishing what I left back home. This helped me gain more balance in my life and become a better wife.

All of this would not have been possible without his support. Not wanting to take away from the little time we had together, he declined professional positions of responsibility, like being chief resident. At the beginning of our marriage, he worked everyday, getting up before sunrise and rarely coming home before nightfall. In all this craziness, he made time, even a little time, to spend together. I appreciate that he continues to do this.

My husband's lot was not easy either and it was heartbreaking to see him come home exhausted. My deepest desire was to relieve him from the stress and daily pressures of his job. All I could do was be present for him, take care of him, feed him, encourage him and remind him that I was grateful for all the sacrifices he was making for our family. Many times, I wished I could do more. Now, it is clear that this was what he needed most—my support and encouragement—and that meeting that need proved to be the most fulfilling of all. The struggles in our marriage—my own and those we have shared—have made me grow and have transformed me. Slowly, I have shifted from a focus on what *I want* to *what I need to and want to give*. Before we started dating, I did not want to play second fiddle to my husband's patients, and now, after we have been married for some years, I try to find ways to help him serve his patients better, to allow him to be more fulfilled.

In the end, the suffering in our marriage—my husband's exhausting work schedule, my desire for fulfilling work, our financial stresses and struggles with infertility—has brought us closer to one another. We began to pray together and asked others for prayers. It was a difficult time and it tested our marriage in its very infancy. Writing about it is still painful. But learning to carry my cross, *our* cross, showed me that God was present in our lives, through and in our suffering.

Our adventure continues. These hardships have brought me closer to God, my husband and my wedding vows. When I said "in good times and in bad," I never imagined that *this* is what I meant. Yet, through much grace and prayer, some things have improved for us and others. I have learned to see in a new light and I am happy and proud that I became the wife I was refusing to be when I first met my husband. After six years and counting, I am still learning, but supporting him is no longer a job for me. It is my way of loving him. God called me to be a wife. Doing His will, and taking on the challenges that it implies, brings me much joy and peace.

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