

Team Ministry

Part 1: Decisions

Introduction

If you are a young married couple, then you are making important decisions. You are deciding what firm to work for and when to start a family. You are asking yourselves questions like... "Should we get more education?" "Should we learn another language so we have more opportunities?" "Should we try to buy a car?" "Where should we live?" "How much time should we spend with our in-laws?" If this sounds familiar, then you are a young married couple! There are so many decisions to be made.

And if you are a young married, Christian couple then there is one decision that is more important than all of these. It is a decision that needs to be made before you make any others. Here it is: "Have we made the decision to serve Jesus Christ as a couple?" Ann and I made that decision before we were married at age 20. Both of us attended a retreat in the mountains, and we heard a speaker who challenged us on the basis of Romans 12:1&2 to give our lives to Christ for his service. Each of us made that decision independently as we prayed and considered what the speaker had said. And each of us said to Jesus Christ that we would serve Him with all of our lives.

What did that mean for us?

We didn't know what this decision would mean. We were only 20 years old. I had not finished a degree in a university and we had many questions. Looking back over the last 30 years we can see what our decision meant for us. We spent 4 years of undergraduate study at a university, four years of graduate study at a seminary, three years living in a foreign country, four years pastoring in a church of 4,000 people and then the past eight years of traveling and teaching in eight different countries. And the entire time we were involved in those various parts of God's

plan for our lives, we were active in ministry in a local church and raising our two sons. Does that sound like a lot? At times it seemed like a lot to us. But, quite honestly, we remained focused on our reason for sacrificing our time and energy...serving Jesus Christ. All of that referred back to the decision we made when we were 20 years old, just before we got married. So, we want to suggest to you that if you are already a Christian, the most important decision you can make as a couple is that very one that we made 30 years ago. All of the other decisions about how you invest your life will ultimately depend on whether you have made this first decision.

What will this decision mean for you?

When you make your decision to serve Jesus Christ as a young couple, your lives will not look like our lives. Fortunately, it is not likely that God has a plan exactly like ours for you. In fact, the plan God has for you is better--better suited for your abilities, better suited for your personal history, better suited for your spiritual gifts and calling than any plan that you might devise. So, what this decision to serve Jesus Christ will mean for you is walking the path that He puts you on. It is a path of obedience and service, but it's also the path of blessing and fellowship with Him. So, this decision will mean giving Him your heart and making your home and your resources available to serve and love God's people in His name.

It is important to consider a few verses in Romans, chapter 8 as you make this decision. Paul has talked about the wonderful blessing of salvation that Christ offers us freely and then He says in verse 31, "Then what conclusions do we draw? If God is for us, then who is against us?" Now pay careful attention to verse 32, "He who did not even spare his own Son but gave Him up on behalf of us all, will He not

also favor us with everything along with Him?" On the basis of that verse and many others in Scripture, we understand that setting our hearts to follow Jesus Christ as a young married couple means that we will have God's favor and blessing along that path. He will give us everything we need and desire.

What exactly is the decision?

If we decide to serve Jesus Christ as a couple, does it mean that we will be a pastor or missionary? Does it mean that we will leave our home city? Does it mean that God will lead us in directions, which are against our wishes? No, it is entirely possible that you will have a job and a house or apartment and in many ways live like everyone does. But there is an important difference!

Maybe the best way to explain what it looks like to make this decision is that you as a husband and wife agree to give Jesus Christ first place in every decision you make. Or, to say it another way, you will consider first the desires of the Lord Jesus Christ in every decision you make. That's true concerning decisions about money and work and education and travel and language study and family! First you ask Jesus what He wants you to do as you make daily decisions. You think about how your decision will help you serve Him, and you wouldn't make a choice that would take you away from ministry in His kingdom. Everything that you would seek in this life comes after seeking first the Kingdom of God. That is a very clear teaching of Scripture. If you will read Matthew 6:33 you will see it said in almost exactly those words.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is teaching about how to live as a citizen of the Kingdom. And the Kingdom of God is what we have been talking about. God's kingdom is not a place or a building or an organization. The Kingdom of God is that group of people who surrender to Jesus Christ as their King, obeying Him and following Him as Lord. In Matthew 5 Jesus explains about the life of those kinds of people. He begins by describing the blessings that come to them. Then He

gives some instruction as to how they are to treat one another and how they are to pray and so forth.

And then, of course, questions came to the minds of those deciding to serve Jesus. "How will we live?" "How will we provide for ourselves?" The Pharisees and the Sadducees of Jesus' day had their answer. They would say, "eagerly pursue any business interests which will bring you money." They reasoned that status and riches were good goals to pursue. Jesus found their attitude to be one of unbelief and offensive to God. And so He teaches those of us who follow Him to have just the opposite attitude. He says in Matthew 6:25 not to worry about our living, what we are going to eat or drink or how we are going to clothe ourselves.

And He goes on to explain in these verses that there are really two ways to think about having what we need to live. The first is the belief that my work and my righteousness will provide for me. In this case, my first thought in the morning when I awake and the last thought at night before I sleep is about providing for myself and for my family. Very little time and thought is given to God and His kingdom because of concerns about daily life. That is the attitude that Jesus condemns. It was the attitude of the Pharisees. Notice what Jesus says about this way of thinking, "For on all these things the unbelievers center their attention." In other words, thoughts about status and money consume the unbeliever.

But, Jesus taught us that there is another way to reason. We can believe that our Father in heaven will care for us. Jesus says in verse 31 not to worry by asking questions about what we will eat or what we will wear. If you have made the decision to follow Jesus Christ and to be an active and obedient child of his Kingdom, then God assures you that He will provide what you need. In verse 32 Jesus says, "Your Father in Heaven knows that you need all these things." Because of that great truth and because you trust that statement of Jesus Christ, then verse 33 tells us what

our life looks like. "But you seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things (that is the food and clothing and all the other necessities of life) will be added to you." Clearly He means that our Father in heaven who knows that we need these things will see that we have them.

Is trusting God "realistic"?

Someone might say, "Living that way is denying reality. We must provide for ourselves because the world is a hard place." Well, is it really possible not to be concerned as a young married couple about jobs and income and houses and cars and clothes? Is it really possible? Helping you answer that question is the purpose of this chapter. Let us ask you, "Have you reached the point as a married couple, after careful consideration, where you have by faith said that your goal is to put Jesus Christ, His kingdom and what He considers right above everything else. If your answer is "Yes!" then here is God's assurance to you. Without telling you how He is going to provide those things, He says that He will. And He says to us, "Just focus your whole attention on putting spiritual things first." That is reality! The character of God is more real and more trustworthy than anything else!

Can you show us examples in the New Testament?

Well, perhaps the clearest example of a person who made this decision was the apostle Paul. He tells us about this decision in the book of Philippians, the third chapter. After becoming a Christian, Paul had to think very carefully about his life. He was naturally gifted. He was intelligent. He had status in his community. He had a good income as a Rabbi and teacher. He really had pretty much everything the world could offer him that would make him feel secure. He lists those things in chapter 3:4-6.

But, after meeting Christ and realizing the surpassing greatness and power of God's grace and of the Gospel, Paul says that at that point, he

considered carefully everything in his life. He concludes in verse 7, "Everything that was gain for me, I have considered as loss for Christ's sake. And what is more, I regard everything as loss in comparison with the supreme value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have incurred the loss of all things and consider them rubbish in order to gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness based on the law, but through faith in Christ the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith that I may know Him and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings, becoming like Him in his death in order that I might arrive at the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:7-11).

What Paul is telling us in this passage is that on one side of the scale he put all of his earthly values and accomplishments, all of his security and all of his goals. On the other side of the scale he put the kingdom of God, ministry for Jesus Christ and walking the path of obedience. He considered carefully what it would cost him to love and serve the unbeliever by presenting the Gospel and to love and serve the believer in the Church in acts of service. And he says that there was no comparison at all between the two sides of the scale.

And so for Paul, when he looked at all of the things on the earthly side, they were like trash or rubbish, something to be thrown away, something of absolutely no value. And when he looked at the side of the scale that had things concerning God and his Son, Jesus Christ, he found those to be of absolutely unsurpassable value. So for Paul, the decision was a clear one.

Your response

We hope you will consider what we have said in this chapter. We hope you as husband and wife will read the Scriptures that we have mentioned and will consider the decision to follow Jesus Christ very carefully. And we hope that you as a couple, when you have both agreed to the decision will spend the

time praying together and say to Him what is on your heart in this regard. As a second part of that decision, we hope that you will discuss this with your pastor, a mature Christian friend or a couple in your Church. Why not ask them how to get started? In the chapters that follow we are going to talk about some of the steps of action which proceed from this decision.

Is committing our lives to Jesus Christ a decision we make once or many times?

Well, the answer is yes and yes. Please read Luke 9:23-26. The reason that the decision to follow Christ is made every day is because Jesus tells us that. In verse 23 He says to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it but whoever loses his life for my sake, he is the one who will save it." What Jesus means by these words is very clear because seeking to save my life means to hold onto or keep for myself everything that is valuable and makes me secure.

The cross, on the other hand, is a symbol of death, which means the yielding of and giving up of everything that I possess, symbolized by the giving up of my physical life. So, it is clear that the decision to follow Christ is one we make every day; that each day brings new opportunities and challenges and responsibilities. Of course, our daily responsibilities will take some of our time and attention. Work, rest and many other things demand much of our attention. But for some people, earthly things become a consuming part of life, leaving very little time for the kingdom of God. So Jesus is telling us in this verse that each day we have to consider that in order to serve Him we are going to have to give up certain things. We are going to have to decide to make our time and resources available to Him. And that decision is going to cost us something--every day.

On the other hand, in this chapter, the decision we are talking

about is really a once and for all decision. In Luke 14:28-30 Jesus tells the parable of a man building a tower. Now, it is important to realize that there are many, many people following Him at this point. In verse 25 it says "a great multitude" were going along with Him. And Jesus is now going to turn to them and help them to realize that in order to follow Christ they must make a decision, a costly decision. In verse 28, by way of example He says, "Which one of you when you are going to build a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it. Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish all who observe it will begin to ridicule him, saying 'This man began to build but was not able to finish'."

And in verse 33, Jesus applies this parable and another by saying, "So therefore no one of you can be my disciples who does not give up all his possessions." Now, understand that what Jesus is talking about here is a time in every person's life as they follow Christ when they begin to understand and realize that the two paths in life, the path of serving myself and seeking what the world has to offer and the path of seeking to please Jesus Christ and bear fruit for his Kingdom begin to separate. At some point in the Christian life, that crossroads becomes very clear to us. And at that point, Jesus said, you need to sit down and consider very carefully which path you want to walk.

Perhaps now is a good time for you as a couple to decide which path you will walk. What is the most important thing in your lives? What is worth living for? If you choose not to follow Christ, there will be a price to pay too! Will the price be greater if you serve Jesus or serve yourselves? How will your decision now effect your children and grandchildren?

As a couple, discuss and pray about these things. And decide to serve the King of Kings!

Team Ministry

Part 2: Building a Spiritual House

Introduction

Once we have made the decision to give Christ first place in our lives as a couple, what's next? Well, let us use an illustration. How do you build a house? First you need a foundation.

The foundation

To build our marriage and ministry, we first must feed our own spiritual lives. Bible study, participation in a local Church, prayer together will all contribute. You probably already know how to build your foundation. If you have questions about feeding your spiritual lives we encourage you to talk with your pastor. He would rejoice to help you in growing as a Christian.

The walls

The second step is building the walls on the foundation. Christian couples who want to serve Jesus need to build a one-flesh relationship. Genesis 2:23, 24 uses the expression "one flesh" to describe God's ideal for marriage since the creation of the world. In the New Testament we discover the full extent of what a one-flesh relationship is. In Matthew, chapter 19, Jesus answers a question about divorce by quoting Genesis 2:24. From His use of this Scripture we understand that a one-flesh relationship is a covenant bond.

Then in Ephesians, chapter 5, Paul discusses Christian marriage and in doing this he also quotes Gen. 2:24. He explains that a spiritual communion of husband and wife is part of the one flesh relationship. As the wife honors her husband and the husband loves his wife, they demonstrate a spiritual fellowship, which is like Jesus and the church. Paul's explanation is found in Eph. 5:28-32.

Finally, the one flesh relationship refers to sexual love expressed in marriage. Paul again quotes Gen. 2:24 when writing to the Corinthian believers

about moral purity in I Corinthians, chapter 6. We read in verses 15-20 the Christian's view of the human body. Paul explains very forcefully that to commit fornication with a prostitute is becoming "one flesh" with her through sexual union. Paul is writing to correct a problem in Corinth, and the only point we are making from these verses is that a one-flesh relationship in marriage includes sexual love. If you want to see how important and positive sexual love is in marriage, you can read 1 Corinthians 7:1-6.

To summarize, the second thing that we need to understand once we have committed our lives to Christ as a couple is that God desires our marriage to have these three elements of a one-flesh relationship. A one-flesh marriage is like strong walls for your house.

The roof

The third and final part of any house is the roof. As you build your lives together for Jesus Christ, God challenges you to bear fruit for His kingdom. Spiritual fruit is like the roof of your house, it makes it complete.

Think about your life as a Christian before you were married. Would you agree that as an individual Christian your highest joy and purpose in life was to bear fruit for God out of love for Him? We think you would agree with this. And is it true that both men and women who are unmarried believers have the joy and responsibility of bearing spiritual fruit? We think you would say, "Both of them have this responsibility and joy."

Well, what happens when people get married? In our experience with young Christian couples in churches we find very often that the wife begins to think that because she is now married, it is her husband who has responsibility to bear fruit in ministry. And if we ask

the husband how he feels about this, often he feels that the pastor or the leaders of the church are the ones who should be bearing fruit. Have you heard this reasoning from young married couples? Even if they do not say these things exactly, do their lives and decisions show that they think this way? Such reasoning is clearly wrong. Our joy and responsibility in bearing fruit before marriage does not change by committing to a husband or a wife in a marriage relationship. In fact, it seems to us that God brings young Christian couples together so they can serve Him better! In other words, God's purpose in marriage IS spiritual fruit!

Are we building a complete house?

God wants us to build strong walls, so He tells us to become one flesh in our marriage. And God wants us to build a strong roof, so He tells us to bear spiritual fruit as a married couple. It is possible for young married couples to forget the roof on their spiritual house! Husbands may begin to feel that their first priority is providing financially for the family. Wives might say that their first priority is caring for their husband and eventually for their children. But according to the Scriptures, our first priority is always serving the King of Kings. As we serve Him, we fulfill our other responsibilities like providing finances and caring for children. We should not stop serving God to make money or even to be parents!

Does this sound difficult? In fact, it is. And because it is difficult to balance these two purposes of God for Christian couples (marriage and ministry), Paul even encouraged believers in Corinth to consider whether they should marry. His personal gift from God was celibacy so he encouraged each believer before marriage to consider remaining single. In I Corinthians 7 he explains his reasoning. In verse 35 he says that remaining single allows one to have, "undistracted devotion to the Lord." On the other hand, for a young married couple he realizes that their attention will be divided. In verse 32, Paul says that one who is single is only concerned

about the things of the Lord, but in verse 33 he says that the one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, and how he may please his wife, so his interests are divided.

Please understand. This does not mean that God would have every Christian remain single. Paul makes this very clear in the early part of chapter 7. In 1 Corinthians 7:7 Paul says his gift from God is to be content while remaining single. He also says that a husband or wife may be God's gift for our contentment. So, Paul says each man has his own gift from God.

Whether we remain single or get married, in both conditions serving Christ is to be our first responsibility. The difference is that if God gives us the gift of a husband or a wife we have a second responsibility, and that is thinking how we might nurture and please them. To summarize, a Christian couple has two important goals: becoming one flesh and bearing fruit for God together.

Some questions to consider

What are you doing as a couple to feed yourselves spiritually? What can you do to make the foundation of your house stronger? Please read carefully all the Bible passages mentioned in this chapter. In your own words, what is God's ideal for marriage? What is a one-flesh marriage? Would you agree that marriage does not free believers from their New Testament privilege and responsibility of bearing spiritual fruit? What happens to a house with walls but no roof? And would you agree that these two goals may feel like they are in opposition to one another because of the time commitment required for each of them? Consider and write your own summary statement as a young couple as to how you hope to balance these two goals in your own life as a married couple.

A sad example!

Before we conclude this discussion, let us give you our own testimony regarding the importance of building a complete house for God. For

eight years we were active in ministry in our local church in Denver that was pastored by a very visionary man. He was married and had three children. Ann and I enjoyed serving Christ together in this church. We taught an adult Sunday School class and God was blessing our ministry. At one point, we began to teach a second class at a different hour on Sunday morning so we were very involved in adult education. Ann and I always try to build a one-flesh marriage while we bear fruit for Christ, and so both of us were active in these classes. Ann and I were a ministry team!

After about a year the pastor approached us because he felt that we were devoting all of our time as a couple to these two ministries and that there was a better way to be more fruitful. He suggested that since I was teaching these two classes, Ann could be involved in a different ministry in the church during those two hours. He explained that was the philosophy he and his wife demonstrated on Sunday mornings. Each of them did separate ministries on Sunday morning and during most of the week. In fact, some people in this large church didn't even know the pastor was married!

Ann and I prayed about his suggestion, but we decided that it was important for people to see our one flesh relationship of mutual esteem and love in the context of our ministry. Eventually, this difference in philosophy with the pastor led us to another church. It was very sad for us to realize some years later that at the very time this pastor was suggesting we divide our marriage on Sunday morning in order to have a bigger ministry, his own marriage was in fact very weak. He was, we discovered later, involved in an adulterous relationship with someone in the church and today is divorced from his wife and no longer active in ministry.

We mention this pastor because it is not easy to balance the two goals of becoming one flesh and bearing fruit for God. Many pastors and elders do not demonstrate a close marriage as they serve God, so it is difficult for them to encourage you as you try to find this balance. But if God has these two goals for us, let us pursue both of them together as husband and wife! And so we come to the topic of our next chapter.

Team Ministry

Part 3: Hard Work, Better Fruit

Introduction

Have you decided that your spiritual house needs a roof? Good! Then you will be active in ministry day by day as God leads you. But there are some dangers to avoid as you learn to serve the Lord.

Are happy church families really happy?

In the past 30 years, we have discovered that many Christian marriages are being pulled apart by church life and ministry. We don't mean that they are ending in legal divorce. We simply mean that ministry often takes the husband and wife in two different directions. He spends his ministry time with other men, maybe serving on committees or leading a men's Bible study. She spends her ministry time with other women, maybe praying or ministering to children. So in one sense, they are being pulled apart literally.

Through the years we have also noticed that many of these Christian families stay together and look pretty happy sitting together in church on Sunday morning. But we know that picture is not accurate and true. When we have time to sit down and talk privately with the husbands and wives, we discover that they don't feel much like they are fulfilling God's one flesh dream for their marriage. They feel pulled in too many directions. In other words, they are married, but they are not very married!

Four ways to be married

Think about what marriage is. First, we can be married legally. This means we've made promises before a congregation and have a legal paper to prove that we are married. Second, we can be married emotionally. When this happens, we take time listening, sharing quiet moments, dreaming, just being together and enjoying each other's

company. Third, we can be married spiritually. This includes praying, serving and worshipping together. Finally, we can be married sexually, expressing our love for one another physically. We give our bodies as a gift to our mate.

When we look more closely at many marriages in the church we find that, yes, they are legally married but, no, they don't feel married emotionally and spiritually. And when the emotional and spiritual closeness in a marriage is lost, then the natural consequence is that the expression of sexual love in marriage also decreases. Our conclusion is that many Christian couples in our churches don't really feel close.

And yet these same couples, when you look at their day-to-day activities, would appear to be very active Christians. The problem is, as we said before, they are being pulled apart because of their ministry and their church involvement, rather than being drawn together as a couple. So what is the answer? Surely God does not intend for families to have to choose between ministry and a close marriage does He? No! God wants our spiritual house to have walls and a roof! Marriage and ministry do not need to conflict with one another. In fact, marriage and ministry can each help build the other! We would like to propose that you consider ministry as a couple. We call this team ministry. Why not become one flesh emotionally and spiritually while bearing fruit for the kingdom?

Our story: team ministry is not easy

You should know that when we propose team ministry as a husband and wife we understand that it is not easy. Team ministry means that you must find ways to marry your spiritual gifts, your histories and your temperaments. Only then can you serve Christ with harmony and without competition.

And this has not been easy for Ann and me.

I am from a family of four boys and it was not a Christian family when I was a child. Ann is from a devoted Christian family of four girls. By temperament I am more introverted and scientific, but Ann is more extroverted and nurturing. Even our spiritual gifts are different. I like individual study and ideas. Ann likes personal time with people so that she can encourage them. Additionally, there are differences between men and women, and Ann and I demonstrate all of those differences in our own marriage. The way that I look at the world and make decisions is very different from the way Ann does as a woman.

But let us give one example of how our ministry together as husband and wife has produced good fruit. A few years ago we had the privilege of teaching the first marriage conference that anyone could ever remember in Tbilisi, Georgia in the former Soviet Union. It was a wonderful time. Over 120 people attended. For three days we shared in lectures and in times divided into groups of men and women. Many questions were asked and answered, and Ann and I shared all we could about the biblical view of marriage. Toward the end of the conference, the leaders asked those who attended to give their comments about what had been most helpful. The couples from the conference thought about all we had taught them and all of the Scriptures we had studied. Many of the couples said, "The best thing was seeing Gary and Ann's love relationship and mutual respect as they ministered to us together. Their example spoke to us!"

We really weren't surprised at that comment. We were just trying to demonstrate for them what God has taught us from the Bible about having a sweet and strong marriage and then serving Jesus Christ together as a team. We know that a "one flesh" relationship helps us minister to other people, AND we know a one-flesh relationship is a ministry to other people because it demonstrates God's plan for marriage.

Our testimony: team ministry has many benefits

Team ministry really does have many blessings attached to it. We have mentioned one. It overcomes the problem of being pulled apart as we give time to ministries and to church. In fact, serving together helps the family pull together. Some of the most wonderful moments of our marriage have been in praying, serving and praising together as we see God work through us.

A second benefit is that it helps to put to death the egos of both the husband and the wife. One reason couples don't continue in team ministry is that it's painful. When we minister as a couple, it is very possible that our natural weaknesses will become exposed. In my case, one of those weaknesses was a very sarcastic sense of humor. I often times found things funny and when I commented on them, I made it appear that I was making fun of people and circumstances. I certainly didn't intend to do that. I wasn't aware that it was happening, but Ann saw it, and she saw the effect my humor had on people. So in the early years of our marriage, there were many evenings when, after time spent with other couples, Ann lovingly pointed out to me the effects of my sarcastic humor.

Quite honestly, I didn't like hearing about my weakness. I didn't like realizing that I have this blind spot in my life and that it was negatively effecting our ministry together. It is important to say that God intends for us to encourage, but also to correct one another as husband and wife assuming that it is done in love and that it is for the sake of God's Kingdom. How many couples do you know in which the husband or the wife has an area of weakness and that weakness has a negative effect on other people? And do you know also that in the Christian community it is very difficult for anyone to point out those problems or weaknesses to another brother or sister in Christ? So how do believers become aware of weaknesses they need to correct? And how will ego be overcome

so that needed change and growth can take place in my life?

It seems to us that the committed relationship of a Christian marriage is a good place to help our mate see and overcome blind spots that might hurt their service for Christ. Egos may be bruised for the moment, but this process is necessary for spiritual growth. We really mean it when we say that team ministry will help to destroy a part of our sinful egos and eliminate blind spots. As this process continues and we mature in Christ, we realize that some parts of our egos need to die in order to be more like Christ.

A third benefit of team ministry is balance. By balance we mean that if a husband and wife each contribute their strengths to a ministry, it is less likely to have weaknesses. For example, think about what would happen if a man with the gift of teaching exercised his gift, apart from his wife, for many years. Of course, his gift would become finely tuned, and he would be an expert teacher. Yet, what happens when people approach this teacher for personal counsel or encouragement? Well, we know many cases in which the teacher appears rude and ungracious when talking personally to people. The net result is that while strong in the one area of teaching, the ministry is not made complete by graciousness and gentleness toward people. The ministry lacks balance!

How can we have a balanced ministry where more of the Christian virtues are evident? Team ministry as a couple can help! It is very likely that this teacher has a wife who is warm and very skilled with people. With his wife at his side, this teacher has a good coach and compliment to his gifts. He can learn from her and lean on her God-given gifts and ministry.

So we want to encourage you to consider that God is fully aware of the strengths and weaknesses of Christian men and women when He brings them together to be husband and wife and to be a ministry team. Do you know ministries led by strong Christians that lack balance? We do! It is not necessary

for that to happen if the strengths of the husband or wife are blended in a team ministry.

The fourth benefit is that the gospel ministry is seen in real life, not just in precept or teaching. It is very important to teach clearly what the word of God says regarding salvation and the Christian life, but it is equally important to “incarnate” that teaching. Jesus wants us to make His truth live in us so that it is visible to everyone. If you think about Jesus’ prayer in John, chapter 17, He says exactly that. Jesus says the practical example of the unity of believers will “incarnate” the Gospel and make it more authentic to unbelievers. Jesus understood that the world is watching us.

Isn’t it wonderful when unbelievers can see the Gospel in our homes as well as hear the Gospel in our churches! A strong and sweet marriage is a powerful witness to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. We believe that the authenticity and clarity of the Gospel is enhanced in the eyes of a watching world by team ministry.

To summarize, the benefit of a husband and wife team ministry is not just that his strengths are “added” to her strengths. In fact, there is almost a “multiplication” effect in which the fruit born from their ministry together is greater than the sum of either husband or wife. Please understand that the picture we are trying to paint is not that the husband and wife do everything together in ministry. But we do want you to consider that serving Christ together as a couple, using your home as a place of ministry, bears wonderful fruit.

What do you think?

What is your response to this concept? What experiences have you had as a couple serving Christ together? As you think about your individual histories, temperaments and gifts do you see that you are quite different from your mate in some ways? How are you different? How will your different gifts help provide balance to your team ministry? What concerns or fears do you have as you think about ministering

together as husband and wife? Can you think of any benefits other than those that we have discussed in this chapter

that would come from your own team ministry? Do you agree that the fruit of team ministry will be worth the cost?

Team Ministry

Part 4: Participating in a Local Church

Introduction

You should know that Ann and I are not alone in our excitement and our vision regarding team ministry. Many people share this vision and believe that it's the best model. But it is important to notice that many of these people focus their ministry outside the church, not inside it. Many couples who practice team ministry belong to such organizations as Campus Crusade for Christ or the Navigators. These ministries strongly encourage the vision of husband and wife serving Christ as a team.

What hinders team ministry in the church?

Why don't we see more couples serving Christ together inside the local church? Honestly, we don't know any good reasons, but we suspect that there are reasons that are not good. First, the pastor's own marriage may not be strong and sweet. If that is the case, it will be almost impossible for him to encourage or disciple others in this area.

Second, pride may prevent the pastor from having a team ministry with his wife. Such pride is often subtle, and the pastor may not be conscious of its presence. In fact, all the leaders of the church may fall prey to this problem! Unfortunately, any place of leadership invites pride. And it is possible for a pastor's pride to be fed by the praises of men and women in his church. After all, he spends a lot of time in public ministry where others see and appreciate him. If pride enters a pastor's ministry, it will be unusual for him to encourage his wife to minister alongside him as an equal partner.

As an ordained pastor in ministry, I know that pride is always a possibility. Even writing these lessons has been a reminder to me. I try to write clearly, and when I finished all five chapters I felt that they communicated

well. But since we are a team, I always ask Ann to look over what I write. She found a number of parts that were not clear to her and suggested that I write them again. My pride was wounded a little, but what a great reminder to me that pride is an enemy and not a friend of the man who would serve Christ and bear good fruit. And Ann was right, there were corrections needed! Men in church leadership need to honor their wives as sisters in Christ, gifted by the Holy Spirit. But we can easily fail in this, and so fail to demonstrate team ministry in the church.

Third, church culture (the traditional viewpoint of the membership) can be a barrier to couples in the church who want to minister as a team. The history and tradition of your church may not include examples of husbands and wives working side-by-side in service. In many traditional churches, the congregation acts as if the wives of the leaders are not as important to the church as their husbands.

You can see, then, that it is somewhat easier for couples who want to serve Christ as a team to look outside the church for opportunities. This should not be so!

Our personal feelings

Ann and I love the local church, and we love pastors. We have always found great ministry in our own church. We believe that Jesus Christ has called the church together as a fellowship of redeemed people out of a lost world. Christ has promised to strengthen and bless His church and to prepare the people of the church for his return and our eternal fellowship with Him. The church is designed by God to minister to the needs of people through all the ages and seasons of their life. Ministries outside the church are quick to admit that they minister only to a narrow group based on age or circumstances

(university students for example). The church is designed and called by God to minister to all ages--children, teens, young singles, married couples and families. And in the church, care is extended to the elderly as they complete a life of service for Christ.

We love the local church, and we say that even though we have also served happily on the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ for eight years. In those years we saw good examples of team ministry outside the local church, but we have also tried to model team ministry inside the local church. God has blessed our ministries with numerical growth, spiritual growth and leadership growth. We believe that all three kinds of growth are connected to the fact that Ann and I serve Christ together in our local church. Because people see that we love each other as we serve God, they are more eager to learn from us. This can be true for you as well, but you need to be committed to the local church. And your commitment to team ministry will help you overcome the three obstacles inside the church we have described. You need to believe that the fruit of team ministry in the local church will be worth the sacrifice.

What is ministry in the church?

When you hear the words "ministry in the church" do you think immediately of a building and specific times? Do you think of committees and titles? In our view, team ministry in the local church does not mean any of these. A huge part of spiritual growth takes place outside the church building and outside structured meeting times for the various church ministries. It is outside the walls of the church where we encourage most couples to serve Christ as a team!

Think about the times in your own Christian life when the Bible has been explained to you, counsel has been shared with you, prayers have been offered for you, a listening ear turned to you. Where did that take place? Most of us understand from our own experience that growth to maturity

in Christ often takes place in Christian homes or in the mountains or in parks or in cars. Anywhere God brings Christians together is a possible place of ministry and growth. In fact, all ministry in the New Testament took place in homes because there were no church buildings until the fourth century.

Ministry inside the church on Sunday morning or Wednesday night is extremely valuable, and we do well to honor those to whom God gives a ministry title. But it is not necessary to be "Director of Evangelism" or "Youth Pastor" to minister in a local church. We have discovered this fact in studying the Scriptures and in observing people who are effective in ministry. It's not necessary to have a title or a position to serve Christ. Most ministry in the New Testament was done after Pentecost by those with no other designation than "Christian."

So when we urge you to be committed to a local church and to do team ministry, we don't mean that you need to take a position in the church. We don't mean that you need to have a title in order to do ministry. The brothers and sisters in your local church can benefit from the exercise of your spiritual gifts as you love and serve them as a couple during the course of your daily activities. By inviting people to your home and serving them as a couple using your gifts, you will see God do wonderful things and bear His fruit.

So let us repeat. Commitment to a local church does not necessarily mean serving on a committee or being involved in one of the structured ministries. It does mean commitment as a couple to become "one flesh" and to bear fruit for Christ day by day in our own home as we spend time loving, serving and challenging God's people in our local church. This ministry is wonderful and full of joy.

Please understand, we are not trying to discourage you from serving in a structured ministry in your local church. These ministries need to be done! We only ask that you consider first what ministry God would have for you as a couple according to your gifts,

and then consider whether the best place for this ministry is inside the church building or at home. Let your service for Christ flow from how He has designed you! Your pastor will understand if you make a prayerful decision about your central focus in ministry and explain it clearly. In fact, if you ask your pastor and his wife how they would like their lives and ministry to look, we believe the great majority would answer that they would love to have fewer committee meetings and more time in personal ministry. And they would say also that they would much rather minister as a couple in their home than spend so much time in the church building.

So, be committed to your local church, but let God show you what that means for you as a couple.

Your thoughts?

Have you seen more examples of couples serving together inside or outside the local church you attend? What is the tradition and culture of your local church regarding couples serving Christ together? Have you ever talked honestly with a pastor about the danger of pride in ministry? What was his point of view or experience? Has your own view of the local church been shaped more by personal experiences or by God's Word? In other words, have you experienced hurt or disappointment as a member of a church, and so when you hear the word "church" you have negative feelings? Does the quality of their marriage influence how willing you are to follow the spiritual leadership of another couple?

Team Ministry

Part 5: Staying Focused

Introduction

Our last chapter used the expression "ministry focus." What fruit would God have most Christians produce? Some are gifted for public ministry, and such people are so valuable to the church and to the world. Consider as one example the ministry of Billy Graham! But public ministry is not for the majority of us. Most of us are not designed and gifted by God to be in front of the gathered church. In fact, if you examine the lists of the spiritual gifts in the New Testament, you will discover that a numerical majority is designed for personal ministry, not ministry in public.

How would you feel?

Does the fact that most of us will never have a large, public ministry make you feel like your team ministry will not be very important to God's kingdom? Well, let us ask you a few questions. How would you feel if you were able to lead one person to Jesus Christ each year for the next forty years? How would you feel if you as a couple could help one Christian marriage each year grow stronger and sweeter? How would you feel if you as a couple could disciple other young couples in your living room and see them grow to maturity in Christ? Wouldn't it be inexpressible joy? It is! We have experienced this joy of personal ministry, and we are asking God daily for more opportunities to do the same. And this is true even though God has given us gifts for public ministry.

God's plan for world evangelization is one person at a time! God's plan for Christian growth to maturity in Christ is one day at a time! So your personal ministry as a couple is essential to fulfilling God's wonderful plan for the world! The temptation is strong to place high value on large ministries. Resist this temptation!

Look through Jesus' eyes!

The temptation is strong to focus our eyes on the practical needs all around us and to be blind to spiritual needs. Resist this temptation too! It is a fact that people have practical needs. Ann and I often help people with practical needs. I help families move. Ann prepares many meals for people. We rejoice that we can help people with practical needs. And we help our local church with practical needs. In our years of ministry, we have painted walls and shoveled snow and cared for children. Many people are needed to do the hands-on service of keeping the church functioning.

As we observe Jesus' ministry we notice that He met the practical or physical needs of people. Please recall that toward the end of a very long day of ministry, when the disciples urged Him to send the people away, Jesus' response was to feed them. The feeding of the five thousand was Jesus' response to the practical needs of people. But physical needs or practical needs are not the most important!

Look, for example, at the statement of Jesus when He looked at the multitude. He saw them as "sheep needing a shepherd." Notice what Matthew 9:36 says, "And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd." Notice that the compassion He felt was not for their physical needs but for their spiritual needs.

Jesus was able to look into the hearts of the people and see that they needed someone to shepherd them, that is, to care for them spiritually. And notice the response of Jesus to this need. In verse 37, He said to His disciples that the harvest is plentiful but that the workers are few, and He commanded them to pray to the Lord of

the harvest to send workers into His harvest. Then Jesus explained what "workers" would do in His harvest field. In Matthew 10:1 Jesus called the 12 disciples to Himself and gave them authority to cast out unclean spirits. And they were told to heal diseases and sickness. Then He sent them out. And notice in verse 7 that as they were going, they would be preaching saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand."

So in addition to healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers and casting out demons, workers in Christ's kingdom were to focus their ministry as Jesus did. The central ministry of Jesus Himself was proclaiming the Kingdom of God. The message of the Kingdom of God is of forgiveness and eternal life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Clearly, preaching the Kingdom of God is designed to remedy spiritual problems within the heart. And teaching about the Kingdom of God is not just about evangelism but also of making Christ King. It seems reasonable to conclude, and of course we see this demonstrated beginning in the book of Acts, that pastoring people and leading them to maturity is part of proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

The ministry of Jesus was not just about curing practical needs, but primarily about curing spiritual needs. The spiritual needs of people extend beyond understanding forgiveness in Christ. People need to grow in grace and become mature, productive Christians. After all isn't that what Matthew 28, the Great Commission, makes clear to us. If you are not familiar with that passage of Scripture, please read it now and understand what command Jesus gave to his disciples concerning the ministry they were to have until He returned.

In this chapter we want to challenge you with the idea that what you see will determine how you respond. If you see only the practical needs of the church and the practical needs of people your response will be to invest your time in hands-on ministry, seeking to help in practical ways. We want you, even though you are young,

to look into the hearts of people and see their spiritual needs. Looking through the eyes of Jesus will prompt you to respond as Jesus did, by helping people grow spiritually. If you look at people through the eyes of Jesus, your ministry will focus on the hearts of people and the quality of their Christian life. We want to encourage you that this ministry is supremely important.

This ministry of spiritual growth in others can be done by you, even as a young couple, in your own home day by day. And this ministry will bring a kind of joy and fulfillment into your lives which practical ministry cannot, important as it is. Let us remind you again to look at Jesus and his daily work. Learn from His ministry that God is always at work in the lives of people, inwardly. When you listen to people carefully, they will tell you what God is doing in their lives. You will hear people make statements like, "I need to be a better husband." or, "It's hard for me to be patient as a mom." or, "I'm very concerned about how I'm spending my time or my money." or, "I'm struggling with a sin problem." As people make these kinds of statements to you, they are pointing out what the Holy Spirit is saying to them. They are identifying areas in their life where God is prompting them to grow and change.

Your ministry will simply be to encourage God's work! It's not necessary for us to be unusually wise or discerning. If we're good listeners and offer non-judgmental love to people, then they will tell us the work of God in their lives. We like to give the illustration that the Holy Spirit creates "fire" within people. That fire is spiritual hunger, a desire for spiritual growth or change. Ministry is listening to people as they describe this fire to you. Your ministry is to throw "wood" on the fire that God is creating. That wood can be encouragement, challenge or prayer. The result of your ministry will be that you build on the work of God in the lives of people. And the results are assured. Growth will take place, people will change and become mature.

There is a warning that goes along with this: Don't try to create the fire. Many young couples make a mistake in this area. Young couples often believe that any situation can be helped. Young couples may devote many hours of ministry time, hoping to create a sense of desire for change in the lives of people. We believe this is a mistake. After spending a little time with people, you may see that there is no fire because they are quenching or hindering the Holy Spirit.

When He met people, Jesus listened for the work of God. He discerned whether or not they were at a point where they were willing to change? Would they leave family members? Would they sell their possessions? Would they wholeheartedly commit to follow Him? And if He did not hear an eagerness on their part to grow, then He challenged them to come to that point and then follow Him. Read for example Luke 9:57-62.

So, we have learned from watching Jesus minister. He looked for people who were responding to the work of God in their lives. Then He built upon that work by encouragement and challenge. We see this often in the Gospels. Jesus discerns the response of people to the work of the Holy Spirit (the "fire" being created), then He ministers to them.

Consider the time when the woman anointed Jesus' feet with oil. She had been terribly bound by sin, but Jesus could see God's work in her life, as she anointed His feet with fragrance worth a year's salary. Even the disciples who saw this were surprised that so

much money would be "poured out." But Jesus rebuked them by saying that the woman was merely showing her gratitude for God's forgiveness. Then He encouraged her faith and said that her testimony would be known throughout time. Read this in Luke 7:36-50.

So Jesus rejoiced when He saw the work of God in a person's life. He was able to build upon that work by His ministry and see the life-changing effects. We want to suggest to you young couples that the same ministry is open to you as well. As you learn and grow as a Christian couple you create the potential for spiritual ministry to people, that is ministry to their inner needs. And this is true even though as young couples, you are not yet fully mature. So, listen for the work of God, and build upon His work.

Conclusion

As a couple, stay focused on spiritual growth in others. This doesn't mean that we never respond to a practical need in the church or in the lives of people. Because we love our brothers and sisters, we will help in practical ways. But understand that helping to change a life forever by nourishing the spiritual growth in people is our highest calling. We can't create fire within others, but we can throw fuel on the fire that God creates within them.

Some people are called to public ministry, and we praise God for their ministry. The majority of us are called to personal ministry. All true ministry is partnership with God in building His Kingdom.